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The Builder of Bridges

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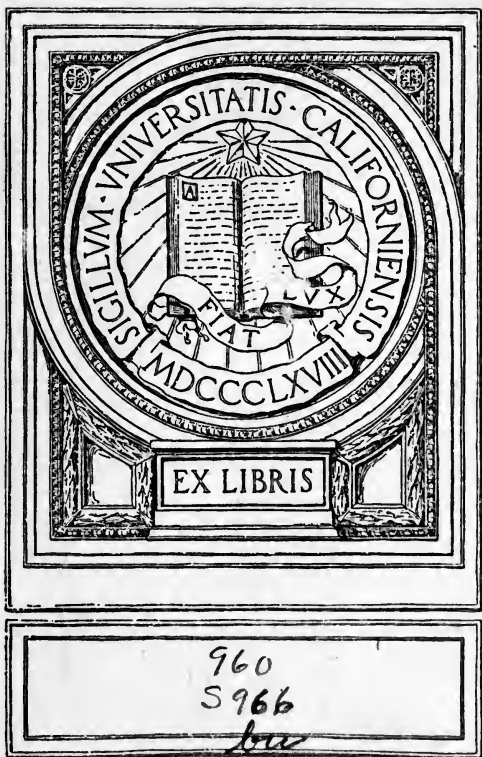


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Act of March 4, 1909.

THE BUILDER OF BRIDGES

Produced on November 11th, 1909, at the St.
James's Theatre, London, with the
following cast:

CHARACTERS

Edward Thursfield.....	MR. GEORGE ALEXANDER
Arnold Faringay.....	MR. DAWSON MILWARD
Walter Gresham.....	MR. E. HARCOURT WILLIAMS
Sir Henry Killick (<i>of Sir Henry Killick and Partners, Con- tractors, Great George Street</i>)	MR. WILLIAM FARREN
Peter Holland.....	MR. E. VIVIAN REYNOLDS
Dorothy Faringay.....	MISS IRENE VANBRUGH
Mrs. Debney.....	MISS FLORENCE HAYDON
Miss Closson.	MISS BARBARA HANNAY
Minnie	MISS DORA SEVENING

TIME.—*The present.*

The action of the play passes in two days.



THE BUILDER OF BRIDGES.

ACT I.

The drawing-room of MRS. DEBNEY'S house in Campden Hill. At back, a long low window with diamond panes, looking on to the road. A door, at right, opening on to a narrow little London hall. The room is pleasantly furnished in somewhat non-committal style—the taste of the younger lady evidently warring somewhat with that of her aunt. It is early spring, and the room is cheerful with many flowers in simple bowls and vases.

As the curtain rises, MRS. DEBNEY, a comfortable, old-fashioned, placid, debonnaire lady of fifty, is seated at a card-table, playing Patience. MINNIE, the maid, ushers in WALTER GRESHAM, a good-looking youngster of twenty-eight.

MINNIE. Mr. Gresham. [*She goes.*

MRS. DEBNEY (*scarcely looking up; she has just drawn a card, that she holds balanced in her fingers*). Ah, Walter. . . . Sit down, she'll tell Dorothy (*With a gesture of annoyance*) A seven! I wanted a queen!

WALTER (*whose manner betrays considerable excitement and nervousness*). Mrs. Debney—

MRS. DEBNEY. Just a minute, Walter—you must let me finish this. . . . (*She keeps her eyes fixed on the cards*) And she'll be here directly, you know. A seven—so provoking! (*With a sudden cry of triumph*) Ah! I've got it! If I move these up to the knave (*she shifts the cards*), of course!

that frees the old eight there—I bring it down, put it under the nine, and there's a place for my seven. Now for my next card. O Walter, if it's a queen!

(She draws a card; MINNIE comes in.)

MINNIE (to WALTER). Miss Dorothy will be down in a few minutes, sir. *[She goes.]*

MRS. DEBNEY (*frowning at the card she has drawn*). A ten! What a shame!

WALTER (*almost angrily, pausing in his nervous walk up and down*). Mrs. Debney! After all, you're Dorothy's aunt!

MRS. DEBNEY (*placidly*). That doesn't console me for drawing a ten when I wanted a queen.

WALTER (*fretfully, as he pauses by her side*). Oh, do leave those wretched cards alone for a moment, and think of me!

MRS. DEBNEY (*leaning back, with mild reproof*). My dear Walter!

WALTER (*penitently*). Oh, forgive me for being so rude—but really, you know, I'm thoroughly bewildered——

MRS. DEBNEY (*with a gesture of resignation, mixing the cards up together and collecting them*). After all, it's not going well.

WALTER (*nervously*). She came back this morning?

MRS. DEBNEY. This morning, yes. *(She puts the cards back into the box)* It's the best variation I've come across yet, but *frightfully* difficult!

WALTER (*leaning forward, with almost tragic impressiveness*). Do you want your niece to marry me, Mrs. Debney?

MRS. DEBNEY. The strange question! Of course I do. She plays the pianola. And besides, I'm her chaperone.

WALTER (*reproachfully*). You didn't go with her to St. Moritz.

MRS. DEBNEY. Switzerland in winter! Thank you. I'm not a Polar bear.

WALTER (*throwing himself into a chair and biting*

his nails feverishly). This all comes from your letting her go alone.

MRS. DEBNEY (*with bland and unruffled surprise*). What has come, my dear Walter? And "let" her, let Dorothy! Besides, times have changed. When I was a girl, it wasn't thought proper to ride in a hansom; now young ladies from the very best families assault a policeman.

WALTER (*turning in his chair*). Why didn't she ask me to meet her at the station?

MRS. DEBNEY. I don't know—I've no idea. But, after all, you catch cold very easily, and Victoria's so draughty!

WALTER (*swinging round again, hurt*). It's not nice of you to make fun of me, Mrs. Debney.

MRS. DEBNEY. I don't—I couldn't—I've no sense of humor. I was merely trying to console you.

WALTER (*eagerly, facing her again*). For what? What has happened?

MRS. DEBNEY (*opening wide eyes*). Nothing—why? What should have happened? Only what you've told me.

WALTER. What has *she* told you?

MRS. DEBNEY. That she had a very good time at St. Moritz—skated, skied, tobogganed——

WALTER (*fretfully*). Of course—that's what everyone does there. What else did she do?

MRS. DEBNEY (*puzzled*). What else?—Oh yes, she danced.

WALTER (*suspiciously*). With whom?

MRS. DEBNEY. My dear Walter, it's a great privilege, I know, to be Dorothy's aunt—but you mustn't expect me to keep a—house agency—of all the men she has danced with. The position's not worth it.

(WALTER *shrugs his shoulders rather angrily, rises, and sets to pacing the room again*).

WALTER (*stopping by the window*). I'm ridiculous, of course, I know that—but still, after all!

(*He turns and comes down*) She goes off to St. Moritz, at a moment's notice, without telling me—I merely get a wire from Calais to say that she's gone. And during the whole fortnight she has been away she sends me nothing but picture-postcards!

MRS. DEBNEY. A great invention for lazy people—Dorothy *is* lazy. And besides—well, my first husband always wrote me long and affectionate letters when he was away—still I had to divorce him, and the Judge said it was a very bad case. My second, poor dear, never wrote me at all, but——

WALTER (*breaking in, peevishly*). Oh, Mrs. Debney!

MRS. DEBNEY (*mildly remonstrant*). You might have let me finish, Walter. I've only been married twice.

WALTER (*starting his walk again*). Nothing but picture-postcards—with just a line to tell me what a good time she was having! (*He goes to Mrs. DEBNEY*) You'll leave me alone with her when she comes down?

MRS. DEBNEY. Of course. Don't I always?

WALTER. You've been very good.

MRS. DEBNEY. Been?

WALTER. I mean——

[*He pauses.*]

MRS. DEBNEY. What?

WALTER (*desperately*). What I can't make out, of course, is your taking all this so quietly!

MRS. DEBNEY. We must move with the times, you see. Girls have more liberty now—I don't think they abuse it.

WALTER. She's only twenty-six!

MRS. DEBNEY. That's old enough, isn't it, to take the train, and stop in an hotel? And besides, Dorothy does as she pleases. When her father died and she came to live with me, that was the arrangement, and I've stuck to it. I've never regretted it. She's a very sensible girl.

WALTER (*despairingly*). We've been engaged six

months—not a cloud! And now, all of a sudden——

MRS. DEBNEY (*soothingly*). 'My dear Walter, she'll have come back, adoring you more than ever!

WALTER (*sulkily*). Looks like it, doesn't it? I've been here half an hour!

MRS. DEBNEY. And when she *does* come, don't worry her with questions—don't play the inquisitor. Every man should conceal from his *fiancée* the husband he's going to be. That's almost an epigram.

WALTER (*dropping into a chair*). If she'll only let me be her husband!

MRS. DEBNEY. Walter, very seriously—Dorothy's not demonstrative—but she's not the kind of girl who changes her mind. She's not fickle, and she's not a flirt—and the only two people in the world for whom she has a deep feeling are you and her brother. So there's really no need for you to be eating your nails—which I'm sure can't be wholesome, unless you sterilize them first.

WALTER (*jumping up*). You're right—of course you're right! If only——(*DOROTHY comes in*) Ah!

(*DOROTHY nods pleasantly to WALTER, and holds out her hand, which he takes eagerly in both of his.*)

DOROTHY. How are you, Walter? I'm sorry I've been so long. I was in the midst of unpacking.

MRS. DEBNEY. The time has flown—I've explained to him the whole mystery of the noble game of Patience. (*She rises*) Well—now I'll leave you.

DOROTHY. Why?

WALTER (*reproachfully*). Dorothy!

DOROTHY. Such a funny idea that engaged people should be treated as though they were infectious!

MRS. DEBNEY. I've half a mind to stop here for an hour, to punish you.

DOROTHY. *Then I should take him for a walk.*

MRS. DEBNEY (*with a smile*). You see, Walter—mere maidenly shyness! It's five o'clock—I've time for a rubber at the club. You'll dine with us?

WALTER. I should love to.

MRS. DEBNEY. All right then—I'll go and put on my things.

(*She goes. As soon as the door has closed, WALTER goes eagerly to DOROTHY, with outstretched arms.*)

WALTER. O Dorothy! My dear, dear Dorothy!

DOROTHY (*with a warning forefinger, eluding the caress*). Sit down, Walter.

WALTER (*disappointed, letting his arms fall*). Oh!

DOROTHY (*pointing to a chair*). There.

WALTER (*sorrowfully*). O Dorothy! don't you care for me any more? Have you changed?

DOROTHY (*lightly*). Silly—why should I? I'm glad to see you again.

WALTER. Have you missed me?

DOROTHY (*sitting*). Of course.

WALTER. I've been frightfully unhappy, Dorothy!

DOROTHY. You had no reason to be.

WALTER. Not a single letter—nothing but cards!

DOROTHY. One really had no time to write down there.

WALTER (*as he sits beside her*). And you left without telling me—without even bidding me good-bye! And what was I to think? Only two days before you had spoken to me about Arnold!

DOROTHY (*nursing her knee as she looks thoughtfully at him*). Well?

WALTER. Arnold in such trouble—your brother—and you to go off like that!

DOROTHY (*shaking her head*). I couldn't help

him here—and it all got on my nerves. Have you seen him since I left?

WALTER. I wrote and asked him to dine, but he wouldn't. I suppose he's angry?

DOROTHY. Not in the least—he thought you were right, that it was quite natural. He was angry with me for asking it of you.

WALTER (*with a sigh of relief*). Of course—he understood. Three thousand pounds! It would have crippled us for life.

DOROTHY (*a little fretfully*). That's all settled and done with, Walter. You said that you wouldn't—

WALTER (*eagerly*). Couldn't, Dorothy!

DOROTHY. All right, couldn't. At any rate we won't speak about it any more.

WALTER. But what has happened in the meanwhile? Has he come to an arrangement with the stockbroker people? They've not made him a bankrupt?

DOROTHY (*slowly*). No—nothing has happened. . . . They've waited, I suppose. . . . Things are as they were—but some arrangement may be come to . . .

WALTER. What?

DOROTHY. I'm not at liberty to tell you.

WALTER. Surely—

DOROTHY (*firmly*). What Arnold says to me in confidence I must keep, even from you.

WALTER (*deprecatingly*). Of course, dear, of course. I'm only so glad that there is a chance of his getting out of this awful scrape. Arnold—the very last man in the world one would have imagined—Arnold to go and plunge like this! The poor fellow! O Dorothy, how *could* you leave him at such a time!

DOROTHY (*rising and moving across the room*). Is there anything more appalling than when someone you love very dearly is in trouble, and you can't help him? Aunt Clara has only her fixed in-

come that dies with her—poor thing, we've not even *told* her about it—and I my hundred and fifty a year that are settled upon me, and they say I can't touch the capital. So I went—what could I do here? Oh, you've no idea what a blow this has been to me!

WALTER (*rising and going to her, trying to take her hand*). I know how fond you are of your brother.

DOROTHY (*restlessly waving him from her*). You don't—no one knows. We're not the ordinary kind of brother and sister. He has meant a great deal to me, all my life. And we're sort of alone in the world, we two.

WALTER (*hurt*). You've got *me*.

DOROTHY. He hasn't—he has no one. And this thing to happen—this bolt from the blue—Arnold, my big brother! And you expect me to say, "Well, he *shouldn't* have speculated—it's his own fault"—and then forget all about him!

WALTER. That's not fair on me, Dorothy—you know how I like Arnold—how grateful I am for all he has done for you. But, after all, he's a man of thirty—and isn't it right—

DOROTHY (*dropping into a chair*). Most things seem right when there's no trouble. Then one doesn't know what "right" is.

WALTER. What do you mean?

DOROTHY. Oh, I don't know. Except that everything's awful.

WALTER (*sitting beside her*). Awful—yes. Poor fellow, he must be frightfully cut up—a mercy he isn't engaged, or married, isn't it? And of course you must feel it dreadfully. What hurt *me* was your not wanting me to be with you at such a time.

DOROTHY. You wouldn't do what I asked you.

WALTER. Dorothy! Three thousand pounds! And I getting five hundred a year! And you know how slow promotion is at the Home Office—

DOROTHY. You have the two thousand your father left you.

WALTER (*eagerly*). I've never spent a penny of that—I've kept it for getting married. And if I gave those two thousand we couldn't furnish a house—have to get things on the hire system—live in rooms perhaps—think of it——

DOROTHY. We needn't go over all that again, Walter.

WALTER (*eagerly and volubly*). But isn't it mere common-sense? Those two thousand pounds make it possible for us—to live as you're used to. And for me to borrow a thousand besides—who never have borrowed a penny in all my life!

DOROTHY (*a little fretfully and wearily*). Walter—Walter——

WALTER (*very earnestly*). As long as you realize that it was my love for you that made me refuse—that, and that only—my care for your future——

DOROTHY (*very sincerely*). I *do* realize it; I never have doubted it for an instant.

WALTER. Oh, thank you for saying that! You can't imagine how unhappy I've been! And now it's splendid to know that things are not so bad after all—that an arrangement may be come to!

DOROTHY (*staring ahead of her*). May be—yes—I think—I hope——

WALTER (*eagerly*). Arnold told you? You've seen him?

DOROTHY. Only for a moment—he had to rush off to the office.

WALTER. He was at the station?

DOROTHY (*absently*). Yes. But one can't talk at the station. Besides Mr. Thursfield was there.

(*She bites her lip with annoyance at having said this.*)

WALTER (*pricking up his ears*). Mr. Thursfield? Who's he?

DOROTHY (*suddenly on the alert—shortly*). He's the man who has been putting up the bridges and

things in Egypt, of which Arnold's firm are the contractors. The resident engineer, I think they call him.

WALTER. He was at St. Moritz?

DOROTHY. He happened to be staying at the same hotel. And of course as he was a friend of Arnold's——

WALTER. He came back with you?

DOROTHY. He returned the same day. And as there was only one train we had to come back in it.

WALTER. What sort of a man is he?

DOROTHY. About five foot eleven, I should think.

WALTER. That's not what I want to know.

DOROTHY (*swinging round to him, and facing him squarely*). What *do* you want to know?

WALTER. Was he aware that you are engaged to me?

DOROTHY. The first night I was there, when I went into the dining-room, I wore a big placard round my neck, "Engaged to Mr. Walter Gresham."

WALTER. Don't be unkind, Dorothy.

DOROTHY. Well, really, you mustn't be silly. Mr. Thursfield's ninety.

WALTER. Is he?

DOROTHY. Well, at any rate, he's at least forty.

WALTER. That's not such a very great age. Why didn't you tell me about him before?

DOROTHY (*fretful under the cross-examination*). Do you want me to tell you about *all* the men I've spoken to down there? Because there were quite a good many.

WALTER. You're very hard on me, Dorothy. Why wasn't I allowed to meet you at the station?

DOROTHY. Because I wanted to see Arnold, and to hear from him—oh, don't ask me any more questions! It's all difficult enough!

WALTER. What is?

DOROTHY. What? (*She springs to her feet*) Am I of stone, do you think? Years ago, before

you came into my life, there was Arnold, everything to me. As a child, I adored him and worshipped him. There's nothing in all this world I wouldn't do for him, or he for me. And now to think of him, with ruin, disgrace ahead!

WALTER (*contritely*). You say there's a hope—we'll cling to that. The poor, dear fellow! Your brother, of course—the one person beside myself who—O Dorothy, each time I leave you, it makes me mad when I think how foolish I've been, all the silly things I've said! And I've such a lot of beautiful things inside me that I *want* to say, and can't!

DOROTHY (*gently*). I know.

WALTER (*with feeling*). I suppose it's my loving you so much that makes me—seem so absurd. And to-day—all these questions of mine—what must you think of me? Because of course I've the fullest faith in you, Dorothy—the deepest confidence and trust.

DOROTHY (*impulsively*). Oh, don't, Walter, don't—don't talk to me like that to-day at all!

WALTER (*wondering*). I mustn't?

DOROTHY. I mean—to-day there's only Arnold—I can think of nothing but him. (*She looks at the clock*) He'll be here soon, by the way.

WALTER. You'd like me to go?

DOROTHY. He's sore about my having told you—and besides we must talk.

WALTER (*earnestly*). Give him a message from me—tell him I am always his real, true friend. (*He rises*) I may come to dinner?

DOROTHY. Of course.

WALTER. Then I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll go straight away now, and dress, and come back. That'll give us a little bit together before your aunt comes down.

DOROTHY (*a little drily*). As you like.

WALTER. And, Dorothy—my dear Dorothy—say something kind to me!

(DOROTHY looks at him with rather a sad smile; then goes to him, lays a hand on his shoulder, and kisses him on the forehead.)

DOROTHY. My poor Walter!

(The door opens, and MRS. DEBNEY appears, dressed to go out. She pauses on the threshold.)

MRS. DEBNEY (*whimsically, half retreating.*) The wrong moment! But I *did* cough!

DOROTHY. Come in, Aunt Clara! Walter's just going.

(MRS. DEBNEY rings, then turns to WALTER.)

MRS. DEBNEY. Happy?

WALTER (*beaming*). Yes! Good-bye, Mrs. Debney. I'm sorry I spoiled your game at Patience.

MRS. DEBNEY. Young men who're in love don't care to play at it—it's only natural.

[MINNIE comes in.

MRS. DEBNEY. A hansom, please.

MINNIE. Yes, m'm.

[*She goes.*

WALTER. I won't say good-bye, Dorothy, as I'll be seeing you so soon. By the way, I sent you some flowers——

DOROTHY. Oh yes, they're lovely. I've got them upstairs. I forgot to thank you, Walter.

WALTER. That's all right. I'll be back at seven.

[*He goes.*

MRS. DEBNEY. Exit the hero, humming the waltz from the Merry Widow. Indication of joy. (DOROTHY has sat down, and is staring moodily ahead of her) You don't look joyous.

DOROTHY (*forcing a smile*). Don't I?

MRS. DEBNEY. You didn't. You were wearing the kind of expression that I do when you play Brahms. (*She walks up to her*). Well?

DOROTHY (*looking up*). Well, what, Aunt Clara?

MRS. DEBNEY. Anything to say to me?

DOROTHY. Why, what should there be?

MRS. DEBNEY. I don't know—I seem to sniff trouble. . . . Sure there 's nothing I can do?

DOROTHY. Nothing, thanks—I'm all right. I *am* a little worried, of course—but it will pass.

MRS. DEBNEY. You'd rather not——?

DOROTHY. Please.

MRS. DEBNEY. As you like. (*She sits*) If you want me at any time, I'm there. A woman of fifty is like a policeman in Piccadilly—she can tell you the way to—almost anywhere.

DOROTHY (*suddenly turning to her*). Oh, Aunt Clara, isn't life a puzzle?

MRS. DEBNEY. I've heard it described as a "metabolic activity of protoplasm." Does that help you?

DOROTHY (*shaking her head*). No.

MRS. DEBNEY. Definitions seldom do. When I was seventeen I knew Spencer's First Principles almost by heart, and had mastered the Nicomachian Ethics. When I was seventeen and a quarter I fell in love with, and married, a man who never read anything but the sporting papers.

DOROTHY. I suppose, after all, nothing really matters so very much.

MRS. DEBNEY. Not a bit—to the other people. So Walter 's happy again?

DOROTHY. Yes. Poor Walter!

MRS. DEBNEY. Be careful, Dorothy.

DOROTHY (*quickly*). Why do you say that?

MRS. DEBNEY (*sententiously*). The Piccadilly policeman pilots young ladies very carefully over the crossing when he hears them pity their *fiancé*.

DOROTHY. You're quite wrong, Aunt Clara.

MRS. DEBNEY. Of course. One always is. Walter will make a very good husband, Dorothy. I should marry him soon.

DOROTHY. Why?

MRS. DEBNEY. Well, as you're going to take the plunge—one's apt to catch cold, if one waits too long. (*ARNOLD comes in*) Ah, Arnold!

ARNOLD. How are you, Aunt Clara?

(He shakes hands with her; bends over DOROTHY, and kisses her)

MRS. DEBNEY. I've not seen you for a very long time.

ARNOLD. I've been kept late at the office squaring up things.

MRS. DEBNEY. The "kept late at the office" excuse gets more than its fair share of exercise, but it will do for an old aunt. Dorothy's looking well, isn't she? More than I can say for *you*.

ARNOLD. I'm a bit overworked.

MRS. DEBNEY. Well, take care of yourself, or you'll break down, like poor Mr. Collins, round the corner, who thinks he's a rabbit, and won't eat anything but lettuce. Will you dine here to-night?

ARNOLD. I'm afraid I can't, Aunt Clara. *(MINNIE comes in)*

MINNIE. Cab's here, m'm.

MRS. DEBNEY. Thank you. *(She goes to the door, which MINNIE holds open)* Don't neglect me too much, Arnold. I've been winning a great deal at bridge lately, and I'm investing it all.

(She goes, followed by MINNIE. ARNOLD waits till the door closes, then moves excitedly to DOROTHY)

ARNOLD. What's up between you and Thursfield?

DOROTHY *(in vague uneasiness)*. Why? what do you mean? Has he said anything?

ARNOLD. I only saw him for a moment, but his manner was strange.

DOROTHY *(anxiously)*. Strange—how?

ARNOLD. He asked, could he call this afternoon? I said, of course.

DOROTHY *(springing to her feet, in sudden alarm)*. Heaven, if he met Walter!

ARNOLD *(staring at her)*. Well, what if he did?

DOROTHY (*wildly*). What if he did? He's in love with me!

ARNOLD (*dully*). Thursfield?

DOROTHY. And I've promised to marry him. You didn't speak about Walter?

ARNOLD (*more and more bewildered*). You've—promised—to marry—Thursfield?

DOROTHY (*terribly excited*). Yes, I tell you, yes. Quick, you've not told? I said to you this morning, you weren't to speak to him about me at all. You haven't? Quick—quick!

ARNOLD (*dazed*). No—I've said nothing—I only saw him for . . . (*He passes his hand over his forehead*). I can't make this out—I've not been sleeping much lately . . . Poor Walter! He'll feel it dreadfully.

DOROTHY (*shortly, turning away*). Walter? He never need know.

ARNOLD (*his bewilderment increasing*). Not know? Walter? When you say that Thursfield—

DOROTHY (*turning and facing him*). Yes, yes, yes—what else could I do? But that's no reason why Walter—

ARNOLD (*staring at her*). I see. . . . You've lured Thursfield on—enticed him . . .

DOROTHY. I had to save you. How else could I do it?

(*For a moment there is silence. ARNOLD, completely overwhelmed, drops into a chair, and stares vaguely at his fingers*)

DOROTHY (*moving away*). Mr. Thursfield has promised to tell no one. And he wasn't to come here till I . . .

ARNOLD (*with a sudden groan*). It's all my fault for letting you know.

DOROTHY (*soothingly*). You couldn't help yourself—I saw it in your face.

ARNOLD. First you ask Walter for the money . . .

DOROTHY. I only told him you owed it to the stockbrokers—I didn't say . . .

ARNOLD. That I had paid *them* with the firm's money—that I am a . . . thief . . . (*He rises slowly, with a sudden shudder*) But a man may be a thief, Dorothy, without becoming an utter cur. Of course I won't allow . . .

DOROTHY (*with a weary gesture*). Oh, don't be so foolish! Why do you think I went to St. Moritz?

ARNOLD. You didn't tell me you were going—you didn't consult me. When you wrote me from there—well, drowning men catch at straws. I said to myself, she'll make friends with him . . .

DOROTHY (*letting herself drop wearily into a chair*). Friendship's no use—you know that.

ARNOLD (*rising, slowly and standing by his chair*). And you are—engaged to him?

DOROTHY. He is—to me. He loves me.

ARNOLD (*under his breath*). Horrible.

DOROTHY. I made him promise, of course, it should be kept secret till I——

ARNOLD. What excuse did you give him?

DOROTHY. None. There was no need. It was enough that I asked it.

ARNOLD. You've got him bound hand and foot?

DOROTHY (*almost triumphantly*). Yes.

ARNOLD. And when he learns the truth?

DOROTHY. Not till you're saved. Then—well, someone must suffer.

ARNOLD (*dropping back into his chair, and resting his head on his hands*). I had a suspicion—Heaven help me, I had a suspicion! But I wouldn't believe it—wouldn't believe that *you* . . .

DOROTHY (*bending forward in her chair, slowly and impressively*). That night when you told me you had charged the money to the bridge Mr. Thursfield was building in Egypt——

ARNOLD (*with a groan*). So frightfully easy—the awful temptation—I was to get it all back in a week . . .

DOROTHY. And that the . . . thing . . . could only be discovered by him, and not till he himself had gone through the accounts—well, that night I made up my mind, determined to do it.

ARNOLD (*almost to himself*). I've thought, again and again, of your questions about him—how old he was, whether he was married—I *wouldn't* think about them, but they came, knocking at my brain . . .

DOROTHY. I spoke to Walter first—well, he wouldn't—the poor boy, of course, had he known the real truth. . . . But, anyhow, I said to myself, if Walter gave the money, there would still be the disgrace, the people at the office would have to be told. Whereas, with Mr. Thursfield, no one would know at all. So I resolved that as soon as he came to London—well, when he *did* come, he was ill, and they packed him off to St. Moritz. It was Providence helped me.

ARNOLD. Providence!

DOROTHY (*fretfully*). Or the other thing—which ever you please. Oh what is the use of your looking at it—like that? I suppose there are times when one *has* to—rise above things. You're my brother, and you come before all. And here was this man, who could save you with one stroke of the pen!

ARNOLD (*quietly*). If he did, he'd be a thief, too. He's a servant of the firm, just as I am.

DOROTHY. You told me, he, and he only, would go through your accounts. That if *he* passed them no one would know. Well, he *shall* pass them!

ARNOLD (*with a half-shrug*). Thursfield! Thursfield rob the firm! What I said was that my one chance of escape lay in his not noticing—but that of course isn't possible.

DOROTHY (*triumphantly, as she moves towards him*). Isn't it? You'll see. Mr. Thursfield *won't* notice. Arnold, you're saved!

ARNOLD (*sorrowfully*). Poor girl! My poor Dorothy! You've done all this.

DOROTHY (*with exaltation*). Saved! Saved! Mr. Thursfield loves me—I didn't know that there *could* be such a love in the world. And I was always talking of you—of how much you meant to me—of all you had been since my mother died—mother and sister and brother in one. And you think he'll let *you* go to prison?

ARNOLD. He can't help himself, Dorothy.

DOROTHY. Prison—you! When I felt ashamed, over there—when the—wickedness of it—crushed me—I had only to mention the word to myself—Prison, prison!—and then there was no hesitation. It was awful, of course—I'm not a flirt, you know that, and I've always despised and hated—well, there I was, doing everything in my power. . . . And he, so reserved and timid, who blushed when a woman spoke to him. . . . It was difficult enough, at the start. . . . And then when I found how splendid he was, so simple and real, so fine. . .

ARNOLD. You went on, just the same?

DOROTHY. Just the same, just the same! All I saw was the prison gates, waiting for you. And I—wound myself—round him—till he only—existed—for me. The one weapon I had, and I used it. But oh, the agony I was in, down there, lest he should meet anyone who would tell about Walter!

ARNOLD. But at least why engaged—why this extra cruelty?

DOROTHY. I hadn't intended . . . And I never thought—he was so shy, all the time, so afraid, as though I were a queen and he miles beneath me—I never imagined that he'd have the courage, at least, not so soon. . . . But then, the very last day, we were on a bobsleigh, coming down the mountain—you know what it is, five of us in a sledge, tearing down the slope, all in a fever—he was behind me, his arms around me—and suddenly I heard him say in my ear, "Will you marry me, Dorothy?" and I heard myself answer, "Yes."

ARNOLD. Why?

DOROTHY. I suppose I had forgotten everything else just then.

ARNOLD. And you still mean to marry Walter?

DOROTHY. Of course, of course. I've given Walter my word. And it isn't his fault. Besides, it would break his heart.

ARNOLD. Then you'll tell Thursfield——

DOROTHY. After, after—when you are—saved. I'll merely tell him I—can't. That will be enough. He'll go back to his work.

ARNOLD. And don't you think *he* has a heart?

DOROTHY. He's strong—he's a big man—he won't even reproach me.

ARNOLD (*slowly*). You've no—remorse?

DOROTHY (*with a shudder*). Remorse, remorse—don't use such words—don't talk of such things—how do they help us? There was your life to be thought of—that came before all.

ARNOLD (*rising, going to her, and putting his arms round her, very gently and affectionately*). Dorothy, my poor sister! And I who had promised to protect you!

DOROTHY (*kissing him*). So you have—you've been the best brother, the dearest, a girl ever had! And now listen to what you must do. (*She lays a hand on his arm*) You won't wait for *him* to go through the accounts: you'll tell him, yourself, to-morrow—tell him about the money, and what you've done. At eleven to-morrow at the office, in your room there. Then I'll come in at a quarter past——

ARNOLD (*very gently, still with an arm round her*). Not to-morrow, Dorothy—now.

DOROTHY. Nonsense, how can you think of it! Now, before me? That won't do at all. He mustn't know, of course, that I've heard about it. Surely you understand *that*!

ARNOLD (*with a wan smile*). Oh, yes—but——

DOROTHY. And he'll pass the accounts—and all will be over—all this sickening fear . . .

ARNOLD. Dorothy, Dorothy, can you have been with him so long, without knowing something about him? Because *I'm* a thief, you think *he* . . .

DOROTHY (*doggedly*). He'll do what I ask him.

ARNOLD (*releasing her and moving away*). How strange that you don't understand. Well, we'll wait for him. He won't be long.

DOROTHY (*feverishly*). Don't be so foolish—you mustn't wait at all. You mustn't be here when he comes.

ARNOLD (*still very gently*). Oh, yes, I will.

DOROTHY. Why? I don't want you to meet him to-day. I shall tell him you know about the—engagement.

ARNOLD. I shall tell him myself. And of what we have done—you and I.

DOROTHY. Arnold!

ARNOLD. Of the awful thing we have done—or rather, that I have made you do. I will tell him of our—plot.

DOROTHY. Are you mad? Do you know what you're saying?

ARNOLD (*still quietly and gently*). We haven't the right, you see. . . . Oh, don't think I'm not grateful to you for the—enormous sacrifice you've made. My poor girl! It must have been terrible. And it's all my fault. When I first heard you'd gone, I ought to have at once—

DOROTHY (*wildly*). Why talk of that now? And this isn't the time—to think of the rights and wrongs! You had to be saved—and I tell you you *are*. Do you realize that? Do you *want* to go to prison?

ARNOLD (*slowly*). No. But still—well, I've taken the firm's money—I have—I'm a thief—a THIEF—yes, it's true. But that doesn't make me—I still haven't sunk so low—There's a cab stopping. That will be he.

DOROTHY (*flinging herself wildly upon him*). Arnold!

ARNOLD (*trying to soothe her*). Hush, dear sister—we must . . .

DOROTHY. Arnold, if you shame me before him—if you tell him my secret—for it's mine, *mine*—(*There is a sharp knock at the street door*) There he is. If you speak, I'm finished, done for. Later, I'll tell him myself, tell him all. But now, coming from you—

ARNOLD (*firmly*). I must.

DOROTHY. I'm your sister. You would be covering me with shame, horror. You dare not.

ARNOLD (*staggered*). I . . .

DOROTHY. Dare not. There she goes, to the door. Say a word and I'm ended, done for, done for for ever. You betray me and—Ah, Mr. Thursfield !

(MINNIE has ushered in EDWARD. DOROTHY, anticipating the announcement of his name, has left ARNOLD quickly and stepped toward him. He shakes hands with her—then goes, somewhat shyly, to ARNOLD, who stands, haggard and motionless, where she has left him.

EDWARD (*looking at him with a somewhat embarrassed smile*). Ah, Faringay—

DOROTHY (*going quickly to them*). He knows—I've told him.

EDWARD (*boyishly*). Oh, I'm glad ! Well, Faringay ? Don't look so glum ! I am a good deal older than she, but still—Say something kind to me !

ARNOLD (*thickly*). Thursfield . . .

DOROTHY (*touching ARNOLD on the shoulder*). You'll be late for your appointment, Arnold—it's nearly six. You'd better hurry off—Mr. Thursfield will excuse you.

EDWARD (*whimsically to ARNOLD*). Are you so very displeased ?

DOROTHY (*linking her arm in ARNOLD's and almost dragging him to the door*). Brothers are

absurd things. Good-bye, dear Arnold. Look in here to-night—after dinner. Will you?

ARNOLD. . . . Yes. . . .

DOROTHY. That's right. And cheer up. Good-bye. [She kisses him.

EDWARD (*with a quick movement to ARNOLD, at the door*). Give me a good word, Faringay—say that you're glad!

ARNOLD (*haggardly*). I'll see you to-morrow, Thursfield. [He goes.

EDWARD (*turning to DOROTHY, half in jest and half in earnest*). O Dorothy, that's not encouraging!

DOROTHY (*quickly*). There's something the matter with him—I don't know what. I'm very worried about him.

EDWARD. Oh, then it's *not* because of our engagement? That relieves me, at least.

DOROTHY. Didn't you notice, at the station, this morning? There's something—and I'm afraid it's serious.

(*She sits—he draws up a chair and sits beside her.*)

EDWARD. Oh, after all it can't be so *very* serious, can it? But I *am* glad it isn't because of me—my heart sank into my boots! He wouldn't tell you what it was?

DOROTHY. No—I can get nothing out of him—it makes me very uneasy.

EDWARD. I'll find out, Dorothy—you just leave it to me. I'll have a talk with him to-morrow—and if I can be of the slightest assistance——

DOROTHY (*eagerly*). You will?

EDWARD. Your brother! I'd do anything in the world!

DOROTHY. Oh, Mr. Thursfield! How can I thank you!

EDWARD. Well, in the first place, by not calling me, ever again, Mr. Thursfield

DOROTHY. It slipped out—I'm so used—I've been calling you that so long.

EDWARD. Yes. I thought then that the name had never sounded so pleasant. Now I don't like it at all—and I shan't, till it's your name too. And oh, first of all, am I forgiven for coming to-day? It was against orders.

DOROTHY. You are forgiven.

EDWARD. And even rewarded, in the handsomest way, for my disobedience! I'm so glad you've told Arnold. And your aunt?

DOROTHY. Not yet.

EDWARD (*a little disappointed*). Not yet? But you're right, of course.

DOROTHY. Why?

EDWARD (*gaily*). I don't know, but I'm sure you're right. Because it's you, and the thing you do becomes right at once, because you've done it! I can picture some wandering little deed that's looking for a home, and doesn't know whether it's going to be good or bad—you adopt it, make it yours, and it positively bulges with virtue!

DOROTHY. You'd better not have . . . too high an opinion of me.

EDWARD. I'm a little prejudiced in your favour, of course, because I happened to be . . . fond of you. And you can't imagine how pleasant it is, for a sort of Robinson Crusoe, who comes back, after four years, to this big City, where he has no friends to speak of—and there's some one—he's fond of!

DOROTHY. How is it you've so few friends?

EDWARD. Partly the wandering life I've been leading—partly my natural shyness—partly the way I began! You see, my parents died when I was a baby, and I fell into the hands of an austere grandmother—and the three recollections of my childhood are the Bible, the birch, and the cupboard. No sugar or jam in that cupboard for me—I was in there, mostly! . . . A lonely little wretch—and solitude became a habit. I've had only one

chum all my life—a man at the office, Peter Holland, the manager there. Do you know him?

DOROTHY. I've met him, that's all. He has never been here.

EDWARD. He's something like me—a kind of pathetic iceberg—longing to thaw, and be genial! I've told myself, often, that I was a mere calculating machine—I could hear the machinery whirring inside me! And now—the wonder of it!—I've got *you*—to the end!

(He bends forward and takes her hand.)

DOROTHY *(trying to conceal her distress, as she gently withdraws her hand)*. Do I mean so much to you?

EDWARD. I'll tell you something—the biggest moment I've known was when I'd finished my bridge—when it stood there after all those anxious years, and looked so proud and fine, just as strong as the wind and the water. Oh, a great moment—but not to compare with the one—when I heard you whisper “yes.”

DOROTHY *(quickly)*. On the bobsleigh! It wasn't romantic at all. Snow in my ears and eyes!

EDWARD. I shouldn't have asked you. I've told myself that.

DOROTHY. Why?

EDWARD. At least not then. I should have waited. It was having my arms round you.

DOROTHY *(laughing)*. I had *my* arms round the man in front. But I didn't propose to *him*. We were going too fast round that curve. I couldn't help thinking of it.

EDWARD. I was only thinking of you.

DOROTHY. Then, with that nasty precipice ahead?

EDWARD. Ever since I met you, since that first evening when you came and said, “I am Arnold Faringay's sister,” I have thought only of you.

DOROTHY. With all those fascinating women down there?

EDWARD. They didn't fascinate me. They'd talk to me and I'd answer—but all the time I was thinking of you—and telling myself "her tone was a little kinder to-day—and I believe she likes me—and if only I can keep her from seeing how passionately I love her!" Because then, you see, I never believed it was possible. Oh, I had been so lonely in that great, crowded hotel—lonelier than in the desert—till you came to me!

DOROTHY (*awkwardly*). It was seeing your name in the visitors' list. And I said, "Edward Thursfield—that must be Arnold's friend."

EDWARD. "I am the sister of your friend, Arnold Faringay." I can hear you saying that now.

DOROTHY. You looked very scared. I thought you were vexed at my speaking to you.

EDWARD. The other women had frightened me so! But the moment *you* spoke, something in me said, "This is she."

DOROTHY (*with a laugh*). I might have been married.

EDWARD. Oh no.

DOROTHY (*looking hard at him*). Or engaged then, and still Arnold's sister.

EDWARD. Then your eyes would have been different. You remember Browning's lines :

"She should never have looked at me
If she meant I should not love her."

And I did—at once! You brought the key that unlocked me—made me feel I had a heart, too—could love, like other men! (*He leans forward*) Dorothy, I have never yet kissed you.

DOROTHY (*recoiling involuntarily*). No.

EDWARD. I have read somewhere—and it always seemed nonsense to me till just this moment—that there are things that can only be said in a kiss.

DOROTHY (*desperately*). Edward, Edward, when I asked that we should keep our engagement secret for the present—oh, let me speak! what do you know of me, of the woman I am? *You* have nothing to hide.

EDWARD. Neither have you. I should have known.

DOROTHY. There are animals, aren't there, insects, that take the colour of the things they're near to? There are women like that, too. You have a big soul, a fine nature—one can't be near you without becoming—different. But what do you know of me—the real me?

EDWARD. I could pass an examination in you, Dorothy, and come out Senior Wrangler!

DOROTHY. I'm a mere selfish, heartless girl.

EDWARD (*merrily*). Are you? Then I've no heart either, and am a monster of egotism.

DOROTHY. You've been out there, doing great work——

EDWARD. I've built bridges for people to pass over—that's all.

DOROTHY (*feverishly*). I've done nothing. I lost my mother when I was ten. Last year my father died—we never saw much of my father, Arnold and I. It's a great misfortune for a girl to have no mother. When my father died we came here—Arnold went into rooms.

EDWARD. I know how dear he is to you—and he shall be to me, too. And why trouble yourself like this? You want me to wait—I'll wait till you come and tell me. The next day we'll get married.

DOROTHY. The next day?

EDWARD. Or if that's too soon, in a week. There must be a ceremony, because that's the custom—and all the tribes I've known have their curious customs.

DOROTHY. In this tribe there are bridesmaids and wedding marches.

EDWARD. Why not? In the Soudan they beat

tom-toms, and eat special snails. The great thing will be that we go off together. And I'll wait, and tell no one till then—except my Chief. I must let him know, Dorothy—but I won't say to whom.

DOROTHY. Why must he know?

EDWARD. I was to go out very soon to Rhodesia, to work at some falls there. Now, of course, I can't go.

DOROTHY. Ah. (*Suddenly*). Edward, if I changed my mind?

EDWARD (*slowly*). If you changed your mind?

DOROTHY. Yes. About you. I've only known you a fortnight.

EDWARD. If you changed your mind? That might be, of course—and it wouldn't be supernatural.

DOROTHY. What do you mean?

EDWARD. As ghosts wouldn't be supernatural—because, if there were ghosts, they would be natural, too. But I've never seen any, and I don't believe in them. Neither do I believe you could change your mind, Dorothy.

DOROTHY (*looking curiously at him*). You don't?

EDWARD. No. It wouldn't be you.

DOROTHY. But if I did?

EDWARD. I should pass out of your life as simply as I came into it.

DOROTHY. And not hate me?

EDWARD. Loving you to the end, as you will love me to the end. Dear Dorothy, you don't frighten me! Never in all my life have I built as securely as I now build—on you.

DOROTHY (*wringing her hands in sudden distress*). Oh, you make me so wretched!

EDWARD (*anxiously*). Dorothy!

DOROTHY. I am unworthy—oh, so unworthy! Edward—listen——

EDWARD (*gaily*). And besides, you've told Arnold already!

DOROTHY (*remembering with a shock*). Arnold!

EDWARD. And you wouldn't have done that if you hadn't—Oh, I shan't have to wait very long! But in your own good time, Dorothy. My work teaches patience.

DOROTHY (*almost to herself*). Arnold! I was forgetting Arnold!

EDWARD. Forgetting him?

DOROTHY. I mean—I don't know what I mean. I'll come to-morrow morning.

EDWARD. To the office?

DOROTHY. Yes. (*She rises*) To Arnold's room there. I don't want you to come here to-morrow—or till I tell you. And you had better go now—my aunt will be here very soon.

EDWARD (*who has risen with her*). Very well, dear Dorothy, I go.

DOROTHY (*almost wistfully*). You ask me no questions—you don't want to know *why* I won't let you meet my aunt?

EDWARD. You have your very good reason.

DOROTHY. You have such faith in me?

EDWARD. Seeing that I love you.

DOROTHY. It's impossible for you to conceive that I might be base, deceitful?

EDWARD. *Then* I shouldn't have loved you.

DOROTHY. But if I were?

EDWARD (*merrily*). Then I should build no more bridges, Dorothy—but only tubs, for honest men to live in—and inhabit the first one myself—and wait there, with my dog and my lantern, till you came and told me what a fool I was—not to know that it couldn't be true! (*He holds out his hand*) Good-bye!

DOROTHY. Good-bye—till to-morrow.

(*She gives him her hand—he raises it to his lips, and goes*)

CURTAIN.

ACT II.

ARNOLD FARINGAY'S room in the office of Sir Henry Killick and Partners, Great George Street. It is on the third floor. There is a door at back, opening on to a corridor—another at right, leading to an inner room.

The appointments are of the ordinary office kind—the furniture of mahogany, considerably the worse for wear ; carpets, chairs, etc., all comfortable, but decidedly shabby. On the distempered walls hang photographs of bridges—the Forth Bridge, the Clifton Suspension Bridge, etc., and the Great Dam at Assouan. There are two desks, one of the large roll-top variety, the other smaller ; there are cupboards, pigeon-holes, shelves with works of reference. A copying-press stands in the corner ; on a table is a telephone.

EDWARD is seated at the smaller desk with MISS CLOSSON by his side—a tall, pale girl with abundant yellowish hair, rather coquettishly dressed in black. She has been taking letters down at his dictation.

EDWARD (*putting the letters he has answered back into the basket*). That's the lot—that finishes us for to-day, Miss Closson. If you'll let me have them pretty soon—I shall be leaving early.

MISS CLOSSON (*shutting her note-book and rising*). Very well, Mr. Thursfield.

EDWARD. You don't happen to know where Mr. Faringay is ?

MISS CLOSSON (*nodding to the inner room*). In there, with Mr. Holland. Been there some time.

EDWARD. Ah—all right.

(*The telephone-bell rings—MISS CLOSSON goes to it.*)

MISS CLOSSON (*at the telephone with the receiver to her ear*). Hullo—yes—(*with sudden politeness*) yes, Sir Henry, he's here—yes, sir, I'll tell him. (*She hangs up the receiver and turns to EDWARD*) Sir Henry's coming up, Mr. Thursfield.

EDWARD. Oh, is he? All right—thank you.

MISS CLOSSON (*hesitating*). I wonder whether I might beg a very great favor of you, Mr. Thursfield?

EDWARD (*politely*). By all means.

MISS CLOSSON. It would be most tremendously good of you if you'd ask Sir Henry to let me have a rise.

EDWARD. I ask him! Why?

MISS CLOSSON. Well, he thinks the world of you, of course—I can see that by the letters he sends you—and he has made a ridiculous rule in the office that no female stenographer should get more than thirty shillings a week—and it's very hard, Mr. Thursfield.

EDWARD (*with a smile*). I suppose it is.

MISS CLOSSON. One can't do *very* much on thirty shillings a week—can one? And I'm a bachelor girl, you know—I live in rooms. My people are down at Sevenoaks.

EDWARD. That's not very far. Why don't you——

MISS CLOSSON (*with the faintest approach to a sniff*). Thank you. Father's a Primitive Methodist—and mother's even worse. You see *I* want to live. I'd be so immensely grateful if you'd say a word to Sir Henry. I'm the senior stenographer, you know, and I've been here—(*SIR HENRY stalks in*) I'll type these at once, Mr. Thursfield.

[*She goes.*]

SIR HENRY. Well, Thursfield, they tell me you want to see me?

(*SIR HENRY is the embodiment of energy—a short stout man, with a very red face and white hair,*

cropped close on the head, a white moustache and a white beard, that is cut so close round his face that it gives rather the appearance of bristles. He speaks in jerks, and always violently, violent and even apoplectic in his anger, violent in his fun and his good-nature. Underlying his brusqueness is a permanent bonhomie.

EDWARD (*who has risen as SIR HENRY came in, now taking a chair, and sitting opposite him*). Dear me, Chief, I didn't expect *you* to come up.

SIR HENRY. I'm not a ceremonious person, and the exercise is good for me. That's why I won't have a lift. About all the exercise I get, going up and down these stairs. Well—what is it?

EDWARD. I don't want to go to Rhodesia, Chief.

SIR HENRY (*all his amiability disappearing, anger coming up in a whirlwind*). The devil you don't! Why?

EDWARD. Well, I've had a very long innings—in all sorts of places. I'd like to stop in town for a bit.

SIR HENRY (*pettishly*). Stop in town—what for? Nonsense, my dear fellow, nonsense. People enough without you to go to music halls and have supper at the Savoy. *You've got to tackle those Falls.*

EDWARD. I'd love it, but——

[*He pauses, hesitatingly.*

SIR HENRY (*snorting*). But what? You were keen on it before you went to St. Moritz.

EDWARD. Well, the fact is, Chief, I'm thinking of getting married.

SIR HENRY (*with a violent movement*). What!!!

EDWARD (*smiling*). Yes. I am.

SIR HENRY (*settling back in his chair*). Well, think of it—and don't do it. Like me.

EDWARD. But I *mean* to do it.

SIR HENRY. Preposterous, not to be thought of! You've lots of time—wait twenty years. Man alive, you can't store a wife with your furniture!

EDWARD. I'm in love, Chief.

SIR HENRY. So was I, once, but I shut myself up for a week, and worked at an air-machine. Grew so excited I forgot about the girl. You try.

EDWARD (*pleasantly*). The unfortunate thing is that I don't *want* to forget about her.

SIR HENRY (*bending forward, tapping EDWARD on the knee, very earnestly*). My dear fellow, take my advice, stop all that love-nonsense. Very unwholesome. Go to Rhodesia.

EDWARD. I can't, Chief.

SIR HENRY (*roaring*). Do you realize what it means? She'll want netting stretched underneath you when you're up on a platform. She'll want all kinds of foolishness. Drop it, Thursfield.

EDWARD (*laughing*). No.

SIR HENRY. Not in your line, I tell you. *You* making love-speeches! A megaphone in a high wind's more *your* form. And see here. If there's a breach of promise I'll pay the damages myself.

EDWARD. If there's a breach of promise, Chief, it won't be I who break it.

SIR HENRY (*throwing up his hands, with a groan*). Oh, Lord, that's how they all go, one after the other! And you the man I counted on—the last of my old brigade—and the best of them all! *She* 'll let you stop four years in the Desert, won't she? Say good-bye to the big jobs, Thursfield, and the man's work—you'll do no more climbing when you've a wife hanging on behind. Damn it, I *knew* this was going to be a bad day—felt it when I got up! Well, to the devil with it all—I can't help it—I've done what I could. Who is she?

EDWARD. I mustn't tell—yet.

SIR HENRY (*with sudden fury*). Not tell! Why?

EDWARD. Her orders.

SIR HENRY (*apoplectic again*). Her—orders! By the Seven Sphinxes of Egypt, you're not taking orders from a slip of a girl!

EDWARD (*amused*). I am, though.

SIR HENRY (*fiercely*). Thinks she's lowering herself, I suppose, marrying an engineer? Wants a poet, perhaps, or a fiddler, or a man who can stand on his head and sing comic songs?

EDWARD. Don't be angry, Chief—but I can't tell you her name yet, and I can't go to Rhodesia.

SIR HENRY (*blowing his nose violently*). Well, if it's got to be—but it's a blow to me, Thursfield, and that's the fact of it. (*He gets up—so does EDWARD*) You're not in luck. First you catch the influenza, and then this thing! Met her in St. Moritz, I suppose?

EDWARD. Yes.

SIR HENRY. Those idiots of doctors, sending you abroad! If you'd gone to Brighton you'd have bored your head off, never spoken to a soul, and come back, just as fit. Well, there it is. I must find someone else, that's all—and pretty quick too. I'd wanted you to start to-morrow.

EDWARD. To-morrow! Why, I've only just come back!

SIR HENRY. You've had three weeks in Switzerland, doing nothing. We're here to work.

EDWARD. There's lots of work I can do in England, Chief.

SIR HENRY. I dare say—but what beats me is how any man in his senses can prefer getting married to squeezing the power out of those mighty Falls in Rhodesia. Nature's biggest mistake, all that woman business. However *I* can't help it.

[*He stalks to the door.*]

EDWARD. By the way, Chief—Miss Closson—

SIR HENRY (*turning round to him*). Who's she? The towheaded type-writer girl?

EDWARD. Yes—she has asked me to say a word for her. She wants a rise.

SIR HENRY (*stamping his foot*). And she won't get it. I've told Holland that already. My rule in this office—thirty shillings a week maximum wage for women. No more.

EDWARD. That's rather hard.

SIR HENRY (*angrily*). Hard be damned—mere common-sense. I don't want them to stop here and become stale old maids. I want them to marry, those silly young fools, and carry on the scheme of things.

EDWARD (*laughing*). And yet you don't want me to——

SIR HENRY (*eagerly*). No—not *you*—nor me—because we're the Masters of Nature, we are, we engineer chaps, not her slaves, like the others. And if they *don't* get married, and have lots of children, whom are we to build things for, in the future? Miss Closson! She's grumbling, eh? I daresay she thinks me mean?

EDWARD (*hesitating*). Well—she——

SIR HENRY (*raging*). Mean! Where's Holland! I want Holland! Where is he?

EDWARD. There—in his room—I'll call him.

(*He goes to the inner room, and calls, "Peter! Chief wants you."* HOLLAND comes out, looking very perturbed and distressed. SIR HENRY has been almost choking with fury.

SIR HENRY. Holland, that yellow-haired baggage, Miss Closson, thinks I'm mean because I won't raise her beastly wages. You'll ask her which Hospital or charity she'd like a cheque for a hundred pounds sent to—and you'll send it immediately. And you'll tell her she'll never get a farthing more than thirty shillings a week here, because I want her to get sick of her berth and to marry. Thinks me mean, by the Sacred Parrot!

(*He stalks out indignantly, banging the door.* EDWARD turns laughingly to PETER, a man of forty-five or so, rather of the typical clerkly kind, but with rugged, masterful features and a hard, incisive manner.

EDWARD. Was there ever such a curious old creature!

PETER. Teddie, Teddie, I've fearful news!

EDWARD (*anxiously*). Hullo, Peter! What's up?

PETER. Faringay has been robbing the firm.

EDWARD (*starting back*). What!

PETER. Robbed the firm—yes—embezzled money—stolen three thousand pounds.

EDWARD. Impossible!

PETER. He has made a clean breast of it—told me himself—this very moment.

EDWARD (*aghast*). Faringay! Good Heavens! How?

PETER. Pocketed the money, and charged it to your bridge.

EDWARD. Inconceivable!

PETER. I'm a bit to blame, of course—never went through his accounts—left it all to him.

EDWARD. I see.

PETER. He was in complete charge. Everything to do with the bridge went through him.

EDWARD. It's appalling! Appalling! When did this happen?

PETER. Six weeks ago, he says, at the final squaring up. You had passed all the other accounts, of course—*they* were all right. These last vouchers are waiting for you now.

EDWARD. Terrible! Where is he?

PETER (*nodding to the inner room*). In there. I told him to wait.

(EDWARD goes to the inner room, and calls "Faringay!" ARNOLD comes out, hanging his head, dogged and miserable.)

EDWARD. Come in. Can this be true?

ARNOLD. Yes.

EDWARD. What made you do it? How, what possessed you? How, how? Speak—say something!

ARNOLD (*his eyes fixed on the floor, in low, steady tones*). A bucket-shop.

EDWARD. What?

PETER (*standing with his back to the wall*). He means one of those outside stockbroker people.

ARNOLD. I've been a fearful fool. Their advertisements tempted me—I went in.

PETER (*stamping about the room*). The brutes advertise their infernal lies all over the place, and our respectable newspapers print them broadcast!

EDWARD (*to ARNOLD*). Well? Well? Go on.

ARNOLD. I made some money at first—I suppose they did that on purpose to get me to plunge—I did—it all seemed so easy! Then came the big slump in Americans—took all my winnings, and all my savings too. They wanted more cover—said it would all come right in a week.

EDWARD. Didn't they know you were only a clerk?

PETER (*bitterly*). Of course they knew—but they knew that a clerk can steal!

EDWARD. You owed them money?

ARNOLD. They said I did—and they vowed they'd come here and tell Sir Henry. They said if I could find three thousand for a week it would bring me in twenty—said it was absolutely certain——

PETER (*savagely*). And to think there's no law to touch those fellows, who go about making thieves!

EDWARD. And you took the firm's money?

ARNOLD. Yes.

EDWARD. And charged it to my bridge?

ARNOLD. Yes.

EDWARD. How could you do that? How did you get the money?

PETER. I just drew cheques for whatever he asked. He had to remit you eight thousand—he said he wanted eleven.

ARNOLD. I was mad with fear and anxiety. I

really believed I was certain to get it back in a week. I used to buy the bills myself to remit to you——

PETER. I had the blindest confidence in him!

ARNOLD. And the bridge was finished—you were coming home. I could have replaced the money.

EDWARD. So you gave them the three thousand pounds?

ARNOLD. Yes.

EDWARD. They asked no questions?

ARNOLD. Only whether I couldn't bring more.

PETER. Of course it all went into their pockets—they knew the market was bound to go down!

ARNOLD. It was their threats to expose me—I must have been quite off my head. But that's no excuse.

PETER (*sternly*). None.

ARNOLD. So I give myself up. (*To PETER*) I should have told you before.

PETER. Why didn't you?

ARNOLD. I've meant to, lots of times, but I didn't—I don't know why. It was six weeks ago—oh, those days and nights I've gone through! Well, thank God it's over. I'll go to prison.

EDWARD. Faringay—I must ask you—have you ever—since you've been here—done anything of the kind before?

ARNOLD (*almost indignantly—then remembering*). Never, never—why, I'm not a thief—I mean, I wasn't, I usedn't to be. I started by sending them five pounds. Till then——

PETER (*shrugging his shoulders*). Only shows one never should trust any one. Well, I must go and tell the Chief. A pretty business!

[*He moves towards the door.*]

EDWARD. Stop, Peter. Faringay, will you go to his room and wait for a minute?

[*ARNOLD goes to the inner room.*]

PETER (*turning and facing EDWARD*). It's enough to make one suspect all the world! My

right-hand man! And in a business like this, where the wages-sheet comes to ten thousand a week!

EDWARD. Peter, if he *had* paid back the money?

PETER. That's the worst of it—no one need have known. He had absolute control.

EDWARD. If it were paid back now?

PETER. No chance of that. Whatever goes into a bucket-shop stays there.

EDWARD. How much have I to my credit with the firm?

PETER. A matter of five thousand or so. Why?

EDWARD (*after a moment's pause*). We'll debit my private account with the money he charged to the bridge. That will settle it.

PETER (*staring*). What do you mean?

EDWARD. It's simple enough. There has been no robbery and no embezzlement—only a mistake. Eleven thousand *were* sent to me—but of these only eight were for the bridge—and the rest for my private account—for me personally.

PETER (*in absolute amazement*). You mean to stand it yourself?

EDWARD (*firmly*). I do—yes. When I go through the vouchers I'll alter them accordingly. So nothing has happened, and there's nothing to tell the Chief.

PETER (*roughly*). That's all nonsense. Don't be a quixotic ass. There'll be an awful rumpus—but I know the Chief—he won't prosecute, when he learns the facts.

EDWARD. Even if he doesn't, Faringay's disgraced and ruined.

PETER (*stolidly*). That's the penalty, and he's got to pay it.

EDWARD. The six weeks he has gone through count for something.

PETER. By Jove, are you finding excuses for him?

EDWARD. I remember what he has suffered, that's all. It's the bucket-shop people I'd like to deal with—pretty products of our civilization *they* are!—But I'll pay the money, Peter.

PETER. Why? He's no especial friend of yours.

EDWARD (*a little awkwardly*). No, but I like him. And I happen to *have* the money.

PETER. The savings of all your life!

EDWARD. I've lots of life left, I hope, and I make a good income. I'll tell him.

[*He turns to the door—PETER stops him.*]

PETER. Hold on—you're acting on impulse—and I tell you it's rot. Confound it, I'm sorry for him too—he came here a mere lad, and has been with me, in this office, more than ten years. But before I'd sacrifice three-fifths of my entire capital——

EDWARD (*a little impatiently*). Never mind about the capital. Besides, there'd be the stain on the bridge. I don't want to add to the number of men who have lost their lives.

PETER. Pretty sentiment, but deuced expensive. Don't do it.

EDWARD. I've made up my mind.

PETER. Even then—how about me? It's my plain duty to go straight to the Chief.

EDWARD. Why?

PETER. Because I'm the manager here, and when one of the clerks robs the firm——

EDWARD. I'll guarantee his conduct in the future.

PETER (*stolidly*). It's my duty——

EDWARD (*impatiently*). Oh, we're always so ready to talk of our duty when it's others who'll suffer and not ourselves! It's your duty to look after the interests of the firm. Well, the firm loses nothing. And you've a larger duty—not to be too hard on a youngster who was driven off his head by a set of rogues.

PETER (*thinking*). I *could* shift him, of course—send him abroad for a couple of years . . .

EDWARD. Yes—that's only just. And more like you. A fellow who has worked side by side with you for over ten years!

PETER. Well, I'll do it.

EDWARD (*heartily*). That's a good chap. And of course you'll tell no one?

PETER. Oh no, I won't tell—I'll keep my mouth shut. But, all the same, it's a pretty mad thing you're doing!

EDWARD. Let's do mad things sometimes—there'll always be sane people enough in the world!

(*He goes to the inner room, and calls "Faringay."*)

ARNOLD *comes out slowly.*)

EDWARD. Faringay, this is a bad business, and I tell you frankly it's a terrible shock to me, as it is to Holland. You were trusted implicitly here, and no temptation on earth should have induced you to violate that trust. But we're satisfied, Peter Holland and I, that it *was* just a moment of madness—and we don't want your whole life to be wrecked. So I've taken over those three thousand pounds to my private account—and no more will be said—and it's settled.

ARNOLD (*breaking down completely*). Thursfield!

[*He drops his head into his hands.*]

PETER. Faringay, it's a very fine thing he's doing—he hasn't more than five thousand himself——

EDWARD. Never mind about that, Peter.

PETER. But I *do* mind, and he ought to be told. As I've said to Thursfield, it's my plain duty to go straight to the Chief. But he feels strongly about it—and he has persuaded me—and I've consented, and promised to say nothing. And I'm a parson's son, and don't believe in sermons—and I'll say nothing to *you*. Only I'm sure that in the future——

(ARNOLD, *completely overwhelmed, gives a broken sob.*)

EDWARD. Don't harrow him, Peter. And—(*he goes to ARNOLD and lays a hand on his shoulder*) we'll both answer for his future.

PETER. Of course I can't let you stop in your berth here—that wouldn't be right—you'll have to

go abroad for a couple of years. They're wanting a clerk of the works for that tunnel we're building in Nicaragua—I'll send you out there. (to EDWARD) That will do, won't it?

EDWARD. Yes.

PETER. But you won't hear any more about this thing from me. And it's Thursfield you have to thank—remember that always. Now I'll go—I daresay you'd like to say something to him.

[PETER goes left.

ARNOLD (*convulsively, bending over EDWARD'S hand*). Thursfield, Thursfield!

EDWARD (*kindly*). That's all right, my dear fellow—don't be so upset. Come, come, master yourself, Faringay. Dorothy may be here any moment—she mustn't know.

ARNOLD (*with a great effort at control*). Thursfield, I can't thank you—I don't know what to say . . .

EDWARD (*soothingly*). Don't say anything, don't say anything at all. What I'm feeling just now is the blow this would have been to Dorothy. It was fine of you, Faringay, to keep it from her. The poor girl, if she *had* known, if *she* had had to go through the anguish of all those weeks! Why, she was talking about you yesterday—she has a suspicion that something's wrong—and that's where you must help me, Faringay.

ARNOLD (*lifting his head and looking wonderingly at him*). I?

EDWARD (*moving away and pacing the room*). Yes, you. Dorothy must never be told what your trouble was, or what I've done. (*He stops in front of ARNOLD*) Never. You understand that?

ARNOLD (*stupidly*). No.

EDWARD. I mean she must never have an idea of what it was that was worrying you. I don't want her to know anything about it. Women always exaggerate these things. She's so devoted to you that she'd put me on a pedestal at once—she'd be over-

whelmingly grateful. Well, I don't want her gratitude. You see?

ARNOLD (*vaguely, and not understanding*). I must tell her——

EDWARD (*almost angrily*). Not a word—I won't have it—I *insist* upon that. Don't you understand? The whole thing has been rather mad. I proposed to her on the bobsleigh—she said “yes” in the fever and excitement of the rush down the mountain—well, that was all wrong. I've been thinking about it—I've lain awake all night thinking about it. She hasn't told your aunt yet—she wants our engagement kept secret for the present—in point of fact she's not sure—and of course she's right. I don't bind her to the “yes” she gave me when I'd no business to ask it. But, good Heaven, if she hears of this, learns what I've done for *you*—gratitude, of course, sweeps everything else aside—she won't hesitate any more, she'll marry me at once. Well, it's her love I want—just her love, and nothing but that. You understand?

ARNOLD (*not knowing what to say, completely bewildered*). But—but——

EDWARD (*a little fretfully*). Don't be foolish—do as I tell you. Why, don't you think I'm in earnest? I've done this for her, of course—but all that it means, after all, is the shifting of so many figures from one page to another, and I don't want a fuss made about it. I don't want to buy her love. So what I claim from you—if you feel that you owe me anything—is that you never let her have a *suspicion* of what has taken place to-day.

ARNOLD (*hanging his head, at a loss what to answer, almost pitiable in his confusion*). What shall I tell her?

EDWARD. Make light of it all. When she comes to-day—and she'll be here pretty soon—about half-past eleven, she said, it's nearly that now—well, you shall see her first, have a few minutes with her—and be pleasant, treat it more as a joke—just as

though—I don't know—something quite trivial. Be jolly about it. Then I'll tell her we've had a talk, and I find it really was nothing, as I told her it would be. You'll do that?

ARNOLD (*brokenly*). Yes.

EDWARD (*heartily*). That's all right—that's good. And now cheer up, forget all this nightmare. It's over—past—done with. And I'm very glad to have been able to help you, Faringay—I've always liked you—well, now we'll be friends.

ARNOLD. The thing that you've done to-day . . .

EDWARD (*patting him on the arm*). No more about that. We'll be friends. And remember this—if Dorothy comes to the conclusion that I am *not* the man—you, as my friend, and *because* you are my friend, will use not the slightest pressure, not bring the least influence to bear. Because I want all, or none. You understand?

ARNOLD (*scarcely above a whisper*). Yes . . .

EDWARD. So *that* is the covenant between us. And, my dear chap, you'll make a clean start again now—I'll see to it that you're reinstated in your berth when you return from Nicaragua—

[*The telephone-bell rings : ARNOLD goes to it.*]

ARNOLD. Hullo—yes. Very well—show her up, please.

[*He hangs up the receiver.*]

EDWARD. Dorothy?

ARNOLD. Yes.

EDWARD. All right—I'll slip into the office, and alter that voucher. And remember, be pleasant! You might have been in love—eh, why not? with Miss Closson, and she won't have you! (*he gives a little chuckle*) Or something like that. I'll be back in five minutes.

(*He goes, quickly, through the door at left ; ARNOLD drops into a chair by his desk. After a moment DOROTHY comes in, ushered by the commissionaire. She waits till the man has closed the door, then goes eagerly to ARNOLD, who has not stirred.*)

DOROTHY (*breathlessly*). Well? Well?

ARNOLD (*looking fixedly at her in slow, unemotional tones*). It's all right—it's settled.

DOROTHY (*almost collapsing*). Oh, thank Heaven, thank Heaven! On my knees. Oh, I'm grateful. Wait. Don't say anything—yet. (*She gropes for a chair, and lets herself sink into it*) All over. At last. Oh, the blessing of it, the joy! (*She springs up, and goes eagerly to ARNOLD*) Arnold, dear Arnold! You're saved!

ARNOLD (*grimly, still keeping his eyes fixed on her*). I'm saved. Yes.

DOROTHY. So he *has* passed the accounts?

ARNOLD. No.

DOROTHY (*letting her arms fall, and retreating a step*). No! What do you mean?

ARNOLD (*with a shrug*). What does it matter, when I tell you it's settled?

DOROTHY. How?

ARNOLD. You're not to be told.

DOROTHY (*bewildered*). I'm not to be told! Why?

ARNOLD (*suddenly springing up from his chair, with a passionate outburst*). I did what I could! I went to Holland first thing, made a clean breast of it——

DOROTHY. Why to *him*? We arranged last night——

ARNOLD. I thought Holland would go straight to the Chief. He would have, of course, but for the chance of his meeting Thursfield.

DOROTHY (*with growing excitement*). And then? What happened then? Why do you keep me in such suspense?

ARNOLD (*facing her, grimly*). Suspense—when I tell you it's settled? (*almost savagely*) I say that again: settled. I'm a free man; I shan't go to prison.

DOROTHY. Why are you so strange about it? And I don't understand. You say he *hasn't* passed the accounts?

ARNOLD (*shortly*). No.

DOROTHY (*puzzling*). He hasn't . . . (*The truth suddenly dawning upon her*) Oh! You don't mean that he has paid it himself!

ARNOLD (*savagely*). I'm not to tell you. You're to think it's only a trifle—the merest nothing. . . .

DOROTHY. He has paid it himself. . . . I never thought of that. . . . He's rich, then?

ARNOLD. More than half the savings of all his life.

DOROTHY. Ah! . . . And you weren't to tell. . . .

ARNOLD (*coldly*). He says he wants your love and not your gratitude.

DOROTHY (*feverishly*). That's like him.

ARNOLD. Says he wants all or none—that he took you by storm down there—that you're uncertain—might change your mind——

DOROTHY (*faintly*). As I shall.

ARNOLD (*bitingly and savagely*). Of course—chuck him over—we've done with him now.

DOROTHY (*almost to herself*). He shan't lose the money—Walter shall pay that.

ARNOLD. You think it's the money he cares for?

DOROTHY (*desperately*). I don't mean to think at all. . . . Yes, I'll do that. I'll send Walter a wire; he shall come at once. And I'll tell him—tell him everything—I must now, you see.

ARNOLD. You'll tell about Thursfield?

DOROTHY. Oh, no—why should I? But I'll show him that he has *got* to pay.

ARNOLD. He won't.

DOROTHY (*fiercely*). How wicked of you to say that! If he didn't—if he *dared* not to . . . But he will, of course, without a word. It was his love for me, that's all, that made him refuse—his care for my future. Well, now he'll see. . . . And I won't let . . . Edward . . . lose the money. . . . How fine that is of him, though—how fine! . . . Where is he?

ARNOLD. He went to the office, that we might be alone. I was to be playful, jolly—treat it all as a joke—as I'm doing.

DOROTHY. I see—I must remember. (*almost to herself again*) Yes. Then I'll ask *him* to call this afternoon.

ARNOLD. And say "good-bye; out you get." Very right and proper.

DOROTHY (*miserably*). I know what you mean. But you mustn't ask *that* of me, Arnold.

ARNOLD (*turning away*). I'm asking nothing. I happen just to be feeling pretty muddy, that's all.

DOROTHY. You're saved!

ARNOLD. Oh, yes, I'm saved, right enough. Just now, when he was talking to me, I had to dig my nails into my hand to keep quiet. "I'm fifteen years older than she—a dull, elderly chap—she may not, after all—you must never let her have a suspicion——" (*with sudden passion*) Oh, someone should take me and fling me into the river. I'm not fit to live.

DOROTHY (*anxiously, laying a hand on his arm*). Arnold, Arnold!

ARNOLD (*shaking her off impatiently*). I ought to have gone to the Chief a month ago, with my head up, and said, "Here, I've done this. I've stolen your money—clap me in gaol." I'd have been a man. What am I now?

DOROTHY. Don't get so excited. Listen.

ARNOLD. That's what I've been doing. And I've sheltered myself behind you—dragged you down with me. And between us—do you know what we've done?

DOROTHY (*wildly*). Why do you say these things? What do you think I'm feeling? Why do you stab me like this? All these reproaches of yours——

ARNOLD. I'm not reproaching *you*—it's myself I'm sick of. *I've* done it all—I! I! Some low, mean cowardice in me I never dreamed of. And don't be afraid—all this is mere talk. *I* won't fling myself into the river—I'll just go on whining for a bit, but I'll accept things right enough. Because

that's the sort I am. They're sending me to Nicaragua.

DOROTHY. Oh!

ARNOLD. For a couple of years. I'll try not to steal out there. But who knows?

DOROTHY (*profoundly distressed*). Arnold! Arnold!

ARNOLD (*suddenly, with harsh vehemence, gripping her*). Look now—when he comes in—stand by me while I tell him all.

DOROTHY (*passionately*). I don't deserve this!

ARNOLD. What?

DOROTHY. I've begun it—I'll end it. You say it's your doing—it's mine. Are you afraid I'm not suffering enough—well, you needn't be. But it's *I* who will tell him—I—when he and I are together. Only not now. Later. And you shall return him the money—I'll know nothing of that. But what I have done to this man is a matter—that concerns only him—and me.

(ARNOLD shrugs his shoulders and turns away. There is a moment's silence. Then EDWARD is heard outside talking to Miss CLOSSON.)

ARNOLD. There he is. I'll go.

[*He turns to the door.*

DOROTHY (*quickly*). Don't. Don't leave us.

ARNOLD (*turning to her*). You are afraid, too?

DOROTHY. I don't want you to go.

ARNOLD. I can't stay here. But you can send for me if you want me.

(*He throws open the door at back—EDWARD is in the corridor, dismissing Miss CLOSSON, who has brought him typed copies of the letters, which he holds in his hand. As the door opens she leaves him and goes; he comes in and turns to ARNOLD.*)

EDWARD. Oh, Faringay, Holland wants just a word with you.

(ARNOLD goes and closes the door. EDWARD puts the letters on his desk as he passes, turns to DOROTHY and holds out his hand to her.)

DOROTHY (*giving him her hand*). You send him away?

EDWARD (*with a chuckle*). I'm full of cunning!

DOROTHY. Had you forgotten our appointment?

EDWARD. Does one forget such a thing?

DOROTHY. Why weren't you here?

EDWARD. The Chief met me and held me captive.

DOROTHY. I have to remember that I am in a place of business. Am I in the way?

EDWARD. Terribly. Do you see those photographs on the wall?

DOROTHY (*looking at them*). The bridges you love.

EDWARD (*laying his hand on a frame*). This one is my very own. I designed it and built it.

DOROTHY. It doesn't look very large.

EDWARD (*very simply*). Five thousand men worked at it for four years, and twenty poor fellows lost their lives.

DOROTHY. And an ignorant girl glances at the photograph and says it isn't large! Aren't you angry?

EDWARD (*with a smile*). No!

DOROTHY. Well, you should be. Tell me about Arnold.

EDWARD. Arnold?

DOROTHY (*sitting and looking at him*). Yes. That trouble of his. He seems all right to-day. You've had a talk with him?

EDWARD (*lightly*). Oh, yes—it was nothing.

DOROTHY. Nothing?

EDWARD. Well, nothing *you* need worry about. Not worth speaking of. Didn't Arnold tell you?

(*He passes behind her, fetches a chair that he places by her side, and sits.*)

DOROTHY. He merely shrugs his shoulders. But I'd like to know.

EDWARD. It's all done with—blown over.

DOROTHY. You did the blowing?

EDWARD. Oh dear no—I couldn't have done that by myself. I dare say I was of some little assistance, but we needn't magnify it. When am I to see you again, Dorothy?

DOROTHY (*rising suddenly*). Come this afternoon.

EDWARD (*rising and pushing back his chair*). This afternoon? To your house?

DOROTHY. Yes.

EDWARD (*boyishly*). I like that. Sounds promising.

DOROTHY (*eyeing him steadily*). Who knows? We'll do our own settling this afternoon.

EDWARD. You mean?

DOROTHY. I mean a great deal. I'm not sure that I'll marry you after all.

EDWARD (*unperturbed*). Why do you say that?

DOROTHY. To see how you'd take it.

EDWARD. And how did I?

DOROTHY. You gave no sign.

EDWARD. No. You remember what I said yesterday?

DOROTHY. You said such a lot of things.

EDWARD. I did, of course. But the main thing was that, if you wished it, I would pass out of your life as simply as I came into it.

DOROTHY. I believe you would.

EDWARD. Surely.

DOROTHY. And build more bridges?

EDWARD. And build more bridges. Perhaps I'm better at that than at anything else.

DOROTHY. I don't know. What have you done for Arnold?

EDWARD (*with whimsical appeal*). Dorothy!

DOROTHY. Why won't you tell me?

EDWARD. One should give one's decision, the judge said, but never one's reasons.

DOROTHY. *I can give you the reason. You say to yourself, the girl's wavering. If she knows I have rendered her brother a very great service——*

EDWARD. I can't allow you to believe I've done anything out of the way.

DOROTHY. You're a poor liar, Edward.

EDWARD. I don't suppose either of us is a proficient in that art.

DOROTHY. Every woman lies.

EDWARD. *You don't.*

DOROTHY. What will you do when I have disillusioned you?

EDWARD. We'll wait till that happens.

DOROTHY. This afternoon at five.

EDWARD (*looking at the clock*). Less than five hours. Hurrooh!

DOROTHY. Why?

EDWARD. Because I'm looking forward to this afternoon. I must think what I'll say to your aunt.

DOROTHY. Oh! You're so sanguine?

EDWARD. It's my temperament.

DOROTHY. Bridges topple sometimes, you know.

EDWARD. Not of my building. I'm rather conceited, of course.

DOROTHY (*suddenly, and very earnestly, with an emotion she can scarcely control*). Edward Thursfield . . . I didn't know there were men like you . . .

EDWARD. That may be a compliment, or quite the other way.

DOROTHY. Yes—you've a real heart in you—a real, real heart. . . . Could I see Arnold before I go?

EDWARD. Oh yes. But *must* you go so soon?

DOROTHY. I've a great deal to do this morning.

[EDWARD goes to the telephone and rings.

EDWARD. Hulloo. I'm Thursfield. Ask Mr. Faringay whether he can come here—yes, I'm in his room. Right. (*He hangs up the receiver, and leaves the telephone*) He's coming. But I'm disappointed. I thought you'd have lunched with me.

DOROTHY. No. I must go home.

EDWARD. Will your aunt be surprised?

DOROTHY. It takes a great deal to surprise my aunt.

EDWARD. Do you think she'll like me?

DOROTHY. It she sees you, she may.

EDWARD. *If she sees me?*

DOROTHY (*meaningly*). Yes.

EDWARD. Oh—then she's the signal! If she's there when I come——

DOROTHY. But perhaps she won't be, you know!

(*The door opens and ARNOLD comes in eagerly; he looks quickly from one to the other; his face falls as he realizes that nothing has been told.*)

DOROTHY. Arnold, I'm going. And you won't say a word to *him* of what I've told you?

EDWARD (*lightly*). Don't be uneasy, Dorothy—I won't let him.

DOROTHY. Thank you—then that's all right. Don't *you* want to know?

EDWARD. You shall tell me this afternoon.

DOROTHY. Very likely I shall. Good-bye. (*She shakes hands with him*) No, please—stay here both of you—I know my way. Good-bye, dear Arnold. (*She kisses him*) Good-bye . . . Edward . . .

(*She looks at him, then goes. EDWARD has been at the door, holding it open for her; he closes it, and returns to his desk, passing ARNOLD, and patting him pleasantly on the shoulder.*)

EDWARD. Thanks, Faringay, you've done that all right. She bothered me rather to tell her, but I don't think she has an idea!

(*He sits at his desk and begins to read his letters; ARNOLD, who has not stirred from his place, suddenly goes eagerly to him.*)

ARNOLD (*feverishly*). Thursfield——

EDWARD (*looking up*). Yes?

ARNOLD (*thickly*). About this money——

EDWARD. Not a word about that. It's all finished and done with. I've altered the voucher.

ARNOLD (*desperately*). But—but—if she *doesn't* marry you!

EDWARD (*shaking his head*). That would make no difference. Only (*he bends forward*) between ourselves—I rather believe she will!

(*With a nod and a smile he turns to his letters, and goes on reading them. ARNOLD stares haggardly at him for a moment—drops his head, digs his hands into his pockets, stalks across the room, and goes. The curtain slowly falls.*)

CURTAIN.

ACT III.

SCENE same as in Act I. DOROTHY is alone in the room: she is nervous, fidgetty, restless; she takes up a book, lays it down, looks at the clock, stamps her foot, goes to the window, pulls back the curtain and glances down the road. MRS. DEBNEY come in, with hat and cloak on.

MRS. DEBNEY (*buttoning her glove*). Dorothy—

DOROTHY (*turning*). Yes, aunt. . . Oh, you're not going out?

MRS. DEBNEY. Mrs. Atkins has telephoned to me—they want a fourth at bridge.

DOROTHY. Oh, don't go, please!

MRS. DEBNEY (*puzzled*). You want me to stay?

DOROTHY. Yes, yes.

MRS. DEBNEY. But you say Walter's coming?

DOROTHY. Yes. Oh, I'm furious with him for being so late!

MRS. DEBNEY. Well, you see, he has his work to do, Dorothy.

DOROTHY (*fretfully*). When I rang him up I told him it was very important—that he was to come at once.

MRS. DEBNEY (*sitting, placidly, on the elbow of a chair*). After all, dear, he's in an office—and even although it is a Government office, I suppose that the clerks are only allowed to be engaged—amatorily engaged, I mean—after office hours, as it were.

DOROTHY. He might have made an excuse, and got away. Besides, he said he'd be here at two—and now it's nearly four! Though that clock's fast— isn't it, Aunt Clara?

MRS. DEBNEY. Sometimes it is, and sometimes it isn't—it's a curious old clock. I've an idea that it

takes a great interest in us, and occasionally stops to hear what we're talking about. [*She gets up.*

DOROTHY (*laying a hand on MRS. DEBNEY's arm*). Aunt Clara, be very good to me, please, and tell Mrs. Atkins you can't go.

MRS. DEBNEY (*reproachfully*). Dorothy! Think of those three people sitting round a card-table, and wanting a fourth!

DOROTHY. Please, Aunt Clara!

MRS. DEBNEY. I often wonder someone doesn't paint a picture of it for the Academy. It would make a sensation—it's so tragic. And I'd call it "Waiting." There'd be crowds round it.

DOROTHY. You'll stay—won't you?

MRS. DEBNEY. Of course I will—if you really insist. But why?

DOROTHY (*after a moment's pause*). Walter and I may need your assistance.

MRS. DEBNEY (*surprised*). Mine? Why, what can I do? And, my dear, it's such a long time since I was engaged——

DOROTHY (*fretfully*). Aunt Clara——

MRS. DEBNEY. And the second one was so prosaic, owing to his being in the timber trade perhaps——

DOROTHY (*in real distress*). Oh, don't—don't tease me like this! You asked me yesterday whether I was worried. Well, I am.

MRS. DEBNEY (*with some concern*). You want to tell me about it?

DOROTHY. Not yet—but I want you to stop.

MRS. DEBNEY (*sitting, resignedly*). Very well, Dorothy dear—of course, if you really need me. . . . Though what I shall say to poor Mrs. Atkins! They've probably got the cards already shuffled, and will be sitting round the table, with their hands folded——

[*A knock.*

DOROTHY. That will be he—at last!

MRS. DEBNEY. Am I to stay here?

DOROTHY. No.

MRS. DEBNEY. But not to go out—to remain on the premises?

DOROTHY. Please.

MRS. DEBNEY. I could get there in five minutes, you know—the bus——

DOROTHY. Please.

MRS. DEBNEY (*coaxingly*). Couldn't I have just one short rubber?

DOROTHY. Oh, Aunt Clara, I want you!

MRS. DEBNEY. Very well, I'm resigned. I'll play patience in the dining-room. And it just happens to be such a fine afternoon for bridge!

(WALTER comes in; DOROTHY goes eagerly to him)

DOROTHY. O Walter, how late you are!

WALTER (*shaking hands with her*). So sorry, dear, but I've been very busy—lots to do—really couldn't get away earlier. How are you, Mrs. Debney?

MRS. DEBNEY. I still placidly offer an unruffled brow to the decrees of the unjust gods.

WALTER (*laughing*). Why, what's the matter?

DOROTHY. She wants to make a fourth at bridge, and I won't let her!

MRS. DEBNEY (*rising slowly*). Well, I'll ring up poor Mrs. Atkins, and try to break it to her. But, Dorothy, what reason *shall* I give?

DOROTHY (*a little impatiently*). Say you've a headache.

MRS. DEBNEY (*as she goes out*). Oh, she knows that wouldn't stop me! [She goes.]

DOROTHY. Sit down, Walter.

(She puts her hand to her head with a nervous gesture, and smoothes back her hair)

WALTER (*sitting*). I really couldn't get away sooner, Dorothy.

DOROTHY (*sitting, facing him*). Walter, I've something very important to say to you.

WALTER (*eagerly*). It's about Arnold?

DOROTHY. About Arnold—yes—and about you and me. I've not been very straightforward with you, Walter—nor with anyone else, I'm afraid. (*Stopping him as he is about to speak*) Hush, let me go on. I want to ask you now—I *must* ask you—and think, oh, think very earnestly before you say anything—would it hurt you so terribly—would it be quite impossible for you to—— [*She stops.*]

WALTER (*eagerly*). What, Dorothy—what?

DOROTHY (*with great difficulty*). To—give me up——

WALTER (*starting back in dismay*). Oh!

DOROTHY. Yes, now I've said it! Are you quite sure that I mean so much to you, that——

WALTER (*almost sullenly*). Of course, you can throw me over if you like.

DOROTHY. I won't break my word—you know that.

WALTER. You're not bound to me—you're quite free. And I'm not clever enough to find—big words—to talk of my love for you. But I do—more than—any words—can say. There's nothing I wouldn't do for you.

DOROTHY (*moved*). I know, I know.

WALTER. Give you up! It would break me, smash me. But, of course, if *you* wish it—Oh, what does this mean? Why are you saying these awful things? I'm sure it has something to do with Arnold!

DOROTHY. Yes.

WALTER. Well, what? Tell me! Why don't you tell me? What has happened?

(DOROTHY *walks across the room, stands for a moment, struggling with herself—then goes slowly back to him. She has made up her mind.*)

DOROTHY (*slowly*). You'll have to make a very great sacrifice, Walter.

WALTER. Sacrifice! Do you think I'd refuse you anything you asked me!

DOROTHY. No—I'm sure you wouldn't—I've always been sure of it. And I haven't the right—I see that. Well, listen. I've kept something from you.

WALTER (*startled*). Kept something!

DOROTHY. Yes. I didn't tell you that—those three thousand pounds that he owed—he had—taken—from the firm.

WALTER (*with a jump*). Taken!

DOROTHY. The poor boy was distracted—off his head.

WALTER (*with bulging eyes*). He stole the money!

DOROTHY. Sh, sh, don't use such words . . . He didn't know what he was doing. Well, it has to be paid.

WALTER. Three thousand pounds!

DOROTHY. Yes. It's hard on you, Walter.

WALTER. Never mind about that. I'll do it.

DOROTHY. I was certain you would—when you knew.

WALTER. I'll do it. I've only got two, of course—they're on deposit at the Bank—but I'll get the other one somehow—borrow it somewhere.

DOROTHY. My little income's no good?

WALTER. No—we can't touch that. But I'll manage it—I don't quite know how—but I will. Only isn't it awful! Arnold a thief!

DOROTHY. Don't, don't—you mustn't—

WALTER (*with a sudden burst of anger*). Scandalous of him, I must say. Disgraceful, abominable—really it is!

DOROTHY (*dryly*). That sort of thing doesn't help us, Walter.

WALTER (*contritely*). No, no—of course—and I'm sorry. But it is such a blow! You said yesterday—

DOROTHY. I was in hopes, then, that it might be settled without calling on you at all.

WALTER. I'll have to pay very high interest. And if they know at the office that I've borrowed a large sum like this—But all that can't be helped.

DOROTHY. No.

WALTER. The awkward thing is that I've never borrowed before—I don't know, quite, how to set about it . . . But I'll go to my lawyer—of course, that's the best. (*With a sudden idea*) Oh, Dorothy!

DOROTHY. Yes?

WALTER (*eagerly*). Look here—it has just struck me—a splendid idea. I'll let my lawyer go to the firm.

DOROTHY (*shaking her head*). No.

WALTER. Just listen. Of course, we can't let them prosecute. But he'll say to them, the three thousand pounds are gone. Very well, my client will pay a thousand.

DOROTHY. No.

WALTER. Or two thousand even, although that's quixotic, because, of course, they'd jump at a thousand.

DOROTHY. That's no good, Walter.

WALTER (*eagerly*). I assure you they would. Why, this is a mere matter of business.

DOROTHY (*looking steadily at him*). No. It isn't.

WALTER (*coaxingly*). Dear Dorothy, of course it's quite natural—you want to be romantic, and generous. You want to say, he has taken the money—here it is, to the last shilling. I'd like that, too, if I had it—but you see I haven't. Now you leave it to me—

DOROTHY. There's no question of money between us, Walter—but merely whether you'll do what I ask you.

WALTER. Of course I will, dear—of course—only let me do it in my own way.

DOROTHY. There can be no way but my way.

WALTER (*a little reproachfully*). But, really, one

has to be sensible in these matters, hasn't one? Just think for a minute! Why should we cripple ourselves for life? Because that's what we'd be doing. I promise you, I give you my solemn undertaking, there shall be no prosecution.

DOROTHY. This is rather—bewildering—to me. And I don't understand. I didn't expect that you—would raise—all these objections . . .

WALTER (*protesting*). I'm not, I'm not—

DOROTHY. I told you, this is a test, in a way, of what your feeling for me really is . . . And don't you see that I'm in very great distress, great worry and trouble? And how can you now, when I tell you this money has to be found, how can you—talk to me—of your lawyer?

WALTER (*deprecatingly*). I'm merely trying to act wisely, Dorothy—that's all.

DOROTHY (*with deep earnestness*). This isn't the moment to think only of what is wise. There are deeper things between us. It's a question of whether you can rise above—everything—now, for me, and because I ask it. It was because I told myself always that you—would—that I felt I hadn't the right—to break the word I had given you.

WALTER (*in great perplexity*). You mean that if I *don't* do this, you *would* break it?

DOROTHY. Yes.

WALTER. You really mean that!

DOROTHY. I do. . Yes, I do.

WALTER. That's frightfully cruel—wicked.

DOROTHY. That may be. I can't help it.

WALTER (*with somewhat sulky resignation*). Oh, if *that's* the case—very well, then, we'll say nothing more. I'll do it—of course, I'll do what you want—whatever it costs me. The money will have to be paid pretty soon, I suppose?

DOROTHY. Yes.

WALTER. Well, I'd better go and see about it at once. (*He looks at his watch as he rises*). Not much past four—I can catch Foster at his office. I

think Arnold might have told me himself—it's rather weak of him—but never mind that. Yes, I'd better go now—a nuisance, of course, I can't tell him *why* I want the money—he'll be asking all sorts of questions. But we must get over that somehow. Well—(*He moves towards her*). Good-bye, Dorothy, dear—(*As he stands by her side, looking at her, his voice and manner suddenly change*) What a fool I am! Of course, you don't mean this! You've only said it to frighten me!

DOROTHY (*stepping back*). No.

WALTER (*almost jocularly*). Of course, that's all. And I was very near—I was.

DOROTHY. What do you mean?

WALTER. Why, when I think of it, I haven't the right—I haven't the *right*, Dorothy.

DOROTHY. You won't?

WALTER. I daren't, I mustn't. You'd blame me the rest of your life.

DOROTHY. You refuse?

WALTER. I'll send my lawyer.

DOROTHY. That's your last word?

WALTER (*excitedly*). It would be madness—absolute madness. Let's call Mrs. Debney—ask her.

DOROTHY. You remember what I've told you?

WALTER (*shaking his head, confidently*). You can't frighten me now!

DOROTHY. For the last time, Walter—will you do this for me?

WALTER. I assure you Foster will settle it—don't be afraid.

DOROTHY. Then, Walter—good-bye.

WALTER (*staggering*). Good-bye!

DOROTHY (*passionately*). Yes—good-bye! Oh, I was going to make the greatest of all sacrifices for *you*! I was going to give you my life, my happiness, all! Oh, I've been a fool! Walter, I break off our engagement—finally, definitely. And it will be better if we never meet again. Good-bye!

(*She goes swiftly out of the room, leaving him haggard and bewildered, too amazed even to attempt to stop her. He stands there, staring at the door through which she has passed, calling softly, "Dorothy, Dorothy!" not moving from his place, turning his head from one end of the room to the other, then suddenly, with a groan, dropping into a chair and wondering what he shall do. The door opens and MRS. DEBNEY comes in, no less bewildered than he. He springs up—she sinks into the first chair and stares helplessly at him.*)

MRS. DEBNEY. Walter!

WALTER (*going eagerly to her*). She has sent you——

MRS. DEBNEY. To tell you to go!

WALTER. Go!

MRS. DEBNEY. Yes! What is it—what has happened? You've had a quarrel?

WALTER. No, no—it's about—ah, of course, you don't know!

MRS. DEBNEY. She says she won't marry you—that she's broken it off!

WALTER (*slowly*). I suppose that this isn't a dream—that it's real. But, Mrs. Debney, she can't mean it!

MRS. DEBNEY. I don't know—I'm bewildered—completely. But I think you'd better go now.

WALTER (*doggedly*). I won't.

MRS. DEBNEY. You see——

WALTER. I won't. She's merely excited—hysterical——

MRS. DEBNEY. That's why I'd give her time.

WALTER (*pacing the room*). A man loves a girl—all right, I adore her! But, after all, there are limits!

MRS. DEBNEY (*lifting her hands*). Always the difficulty! Whose?

WALTER (*stopping in front of her*). Mrs. Debney,

Mrs. Debney, if you knew! (*with a sudden movement*) I'll go to her—where is she?

MRS. DEBNEY. Don't, Walter. Leave her alone—let her simmer.

WALTER (*irresolute*). Would you?

MRS. DEBNEY. I'm sure that's the best.

WALTER (*with sudden determination*). No. I won't go till I've seen her.

MRS. DEBNEY (*resignedly*). You must do as you like. But really——

(MINNIE comes in with a folded note, that she hands to MRS. DEBNEY.)

MINNIE (*looking wonderingly at WALTER*). From Miss Dorothy. [*She goes.*]

WALTER (*eagerly*). From Dorothy! What does she say?

MRS. DEBNEY (*unfolding the note*). That you're to go—go—go!

WALTER. She writes you that?

MRS. DEBNEY (*looking up at him*). Yes.

WALTER (*furious*). So it's true! She sends me away!

MRS. DEBNEY. Only for the moment, Walter—it can't be——

WALTER (*savagely*). Very well—I'll go. If *that's* all she cares for me——

MRS. DEBNEY. You'll come back—come again soon—to-morrow——

WALTER (*more and more furiously*). I'll never come back! She dismisses me—kicks me out of the house!

MRS. DEBNEY (*soothingly*). You said yourself, she's excited——

WALTER. Is there a man in the world would have offered to do what I did? And that's her return, I'm to go! By Jove, I *will* go!

MRS. DEBNEY. Come back to-morrow.

WALTER (*raging*). Never, I tell you! After all,

she's not the only girl in the world. And there won't be any broken hearts either. I've just done with her—finished. Oh, yes I have—I've finished. She can go on her knees to me—I'll never forgive her. Sends me away, breaks off our engagement, as indifferently as though—as though—Oh, I'm done, I've had enough! Good-bye, Mrs. Debney. Thank you for all your kindness to me.

MRS. DEBNEY (*genuinely distressed*). O Walter, I'm so sorry!

WALTER. Sorry—nonsense—it's an escape! Your niece, of course—you'll forgive me—but that's what it is—an escape! Good-bye, Mrs. Debney!

(*He bounces out—the hall-door is heard to slam violently. MRS. DEBNEY shakes her head repeatedly and somewhat reprovingly; the door opens and DOROTHY appears. She pops her head in to make quite sure that WALTER is gone—then demurely approaches MRS. DEBNEY.*)

MRS. DEBNEY. O Dorothy, he's gone!

DOROTHY. Yes.

MRS. DEBNEY. Really I am quite upset. Oh, he was furious! I feel as though I had been tossed by a bull. He frightened me—he was so angry. Dorothy, I'm not at all sure that he'll come back!

DOROTHY. I don't want him to, Aunt Clara.

[*She rings.*]

MRS. DEBNEY. That's all very well *now*—but in half-an-hour you'll start writing him a letter.

DOROTHY (*shaking her head*). No.

MRS. DEBNEY. And he won't answer—and tomorrow you'll be sending me to him, like a duenna in the old comedies—

DOROTHY. No . . . (*suddenly*) Aunt Clara, it's a relief!

MRS. DEBNEY (*staring*). A relief?

DOROTHY. A relief, a blessing! Yes!

MRS. DEBNEY. Dorothy!

DOROTHY. A blessing—for which I am grateful—profoundly grateful. Believe it!

[MINNIE comes in.]

DOROTHY. Minnie, I'm never at home to Mr. Gresham in future.

MINNIE (*startled*). Miss Dorothy!

DOROTHY. I'm not at home, and Mrs. Debney isn't.

MRS. DEBNEY. O Dorothy, surely——

DOROTHY. Please, aunt. You understand, Minnie?

MINNIE (*wide-eyed*). Yes, miss. . . . So if poor Mr. Gresham comes——

DOROTHY. If Mr. Gresham comes, you'll not let him in, under any pretext whatsoever. That's all, thank you.

(MINNIE goes. DOROTHY looks at MRS. DEBNEY demurely from under eyelashes.)

MRS. DEBNEY (*discontentedly*). So this isn't caprice, but—cataclysm! Upheavals, cyclones, chaos, tornadoes, earthquakes!

DOROTHY (*pleading*). Aunt Clara!

MRS. DEBNEY (*waving her away*). Let me go on—it relieves me. I knew there was trouble—it was in the air, I smelt it—oh, I've a fine nose! I'd like to rattle off strings of epigrams and paradoxes—reflections, cynical, moral, and otherwise——

DOROTHY (*laying a hand on MRS. DEBNEY'S arm, and trying to stem the torrent*). Don't—don't——

MRS. DEBNEY. You'd much better let me work off steam that way—because really I'm not pleased. It's a bad thing, in any game, when one of the partners—deliberately—revokes.

DOROTHY (*almost pathetically pleading for a hearing*). Aunt Clara!

MRS. DEBNEY. Oh, you needn't tell me—I know—you've fallen in love with someone else.

DOROTHY (*leaving her and moving away*). Yes. Yes. I have.

MRS. DEBNEY. Of course. You've met *him*. The usual, inevitable, irreconcilable, inextinguishable *him*!

DOROTHY (*excitedly as she turns and faces MRS. DEBNEY*). Yes, I have! And I love—for the very first time!

MRS. DEBNEY (*shocked into silence*). Oh!

DOROTHY. For the first time—yes! I'd never known what love meant. Oh, let me speak, let me tell you! And I haven't much time—I don't know how to begin. But I never really loved Walter at all.

MRS. DEBNEY (*gasping*). Oh!

DOROTHY. I had known him for years—as a friend he was charming and pleasant—as a *fiancé* he . . . bored me.

MRS. DEBNEY (*lifting her eyes to the ceiling*). Dorothy!

DOROTHY (*quickly*). Bored me, bored me—yes. A horrid thing to say—but it's true. And the funny part is that I didn't *know*—I used to wonder what was the matter. But almost from the very beginning I had to run over his qualities to myself, tell myself what a good fellow he was—make excuses for him, as it were. And at St. Moritz I found myself thinking, with a shudder, if *he* were here, if this were our honeymoon!

MRS. DEBNEY (*faintly*). In that case he probably would have been—it's usual.

DOROTHY (*after a moment during which she has stared haggardly at MRS. DEBNEY*). Because, at St. Moritz, there was . . . the . . . other, and I loved him. (*Passionately*) Oh, at once, at once, when I saw him, when I got to know him—I felt it coming over me, mastering me, stealing into my veins—and I struggled and fought—I wouldn't admit it, believe it—I said no, no, Walter, only Walter, I'm bound to him, I won't break my word, I won't, I can't, I daren't. . . . And then, again and again, I'd rush to the table, sit down and write

Walter a letter—oh, how often I've done it—write him, all in a fever, and beg him, implore him, to let me off, forgive me—and then, as I was closing the envelope, I'd see his mild, faithful eyes, I'd think of him getting the letter, see him open it, read it—and I couldn't! I said no, no, I mustn't—I must keep my word, whatever it costs me. . . . And I'd tear up the letter, go down—and meet . . . Edward. Oh, Aunt Clara, I've struggled, I've tried—it almost has broken me!

MRS. DEBNEY (*very gently*). Poor child—my poor Dorothy. . . .

DOROTHY. And when I came back—when I saw Walter yesterday—saw how he *wanted* me—at least I thought he did—I said to myself I'll go on with it—yes—he shan't know. . . . And I would have—I would—or at least I'd have tried. But to-day he opened the door—yes, he did—it was he—I was frank with him, honest—well, I found that his love was not what I thought it—there were things he preferred to—*me*. And to-day I was able—and oh, with what joy!—to say to him, I won't marry you—I break it off. And I have—and it's done with—finished!

(*She goes to MRS. DEBNEY, and buries her head on the old lady's shoulder.*)

MRS. DEBNEY (*soothing and caressing her*). Very well, my dear Dorothy—don't be so distressed—these things happen—they did at the beginning and they will at the end, whether we get the vote or we don't. And so exit Walter—poor boy! muffled drums, requiescat—we shed a tear and go home to lunch. I'm sorry, but then *I* wasn't to marry him. Tell me about the—other.

DOROTHY (*raising her head*). His name's Thursfield—Edward Thursfield. He's an engineer—in the same firm as Arnold. He's a great man—he builds bridges.

MRS. DEBNEY (*innocently*). Is there anything great about building bridges?

DOROTHY. Yes, there is. I didn't know till I met him. You will, too.

MRS. DEBNEY. I'm glad you told me. I thought these things were all done by machinery. When shall I see him?

DOROTHY. He's coming this afternoon.

MRS. DEBNEY (*discontentedly*). This afternoon! O Dorothy! You might have allowed an interval—you might indeed. A little breathing-time. To have the chimneys swept, and Walter's photographs removed. And why such a hurry? I'm rather surprised at *him*—

DOROTHY (*slowly*). He doesn't know about Walter at all.

MRS. DEBNEY (*really shocked*). Dorothy!

DOROTHY (*feverishly*). It's awful, isn't it—he doesn't know, he has never heard. He adores me, he thinks me the embodiment of all that's good. And I've been deceiving him, tricking him!

MRS. DEBNEY. Dorothy, Dorothy! Why?

DOROTHY. Aunt Clara, I think the wickedest things in this world are done by the people who have the best motives. I didn't *mean* to be wicked—I couldn't help myself, that's all. He's coming to-day.

MRS. DEBNEY. For an answer?

DOROTHY. Yes, in a way. If *you're* there—if I introduce him to *you*, he knows that I'll marry him.

MRS. DEBNEY (*smoothing down her skirts*). Do marry this one quickly, dear.

DOROTHY. As quickly as he pleases! Well, scold me, say things. I've been frightful, I know—I deserve it.

MRS. DEBNEY (*patting DOROTHY's hand*). You've not been very wise—but who is? And I'm fifty, and you're twenty-six, so I've got to be twice as indulgent. . . . But I'm thinking of Mr. Thursfield now. He ought to be told.

DOROTHY. He will be—this afternoon.

MRS. DEBNEY. All?

DOROTHY (*earnestly*). All, from the very beginning—all, all! And oh, the relief it will be to me! I shall put my hand in his, and tell him, tell him, tell him . . . I shall be like a child confessing.

MRS. DEBNEY (*doubtfully*). The point is, how will he take it? Men have such funny ideas about honour and so forth.

DOROTHY. He's so noble and big, he'll understand at once. And to understand, they say, is to pardon.

MRS. DEBNEY (*with a gentle shrug*). One of those magnificent maxims we expect everyone else to act up to.

DOROTHY. *He* will . . . Aunt Clara, I feel that I've hurt you, that you're . . . disappointed . . . in me. But a weight is laid on one sometimes that is . . . too heavy. . . . Forgive me, Aunt Clara!

MRS. DEBNEY (*very gently, caressing her*). I do, dear Dorothy, yes . . . *without* understanding. . . . Perhaps that is what we women are here for . . .

(DOROTHY *leans forward and kisses her. There is a knock: she gets up and runs to the window.*)

DOROTHY. Arnold! It's Arnold!

MRS. DEBNEY (*anxiously*). O Dorothy! What will he say?

DOROTHY. He? He'll be delighted? You'll see!

(*She has said this on her way to the door; she runs to the hall, opens the street door, and for a moment there is a whispered colloquy outside between ARNOLD and her. ARNOLD is heard to ejaculate "Splendid, Splendid!" They come back into the room, ARNOLD radiant, with his arm round DOROTHY'S waist. He leaves her, goes to MRS. DEBNEY, and kisses her.*)

MRS. DEBNEY (*staring at him*). So you're pleased!

ARNOLD. Pleased! I'd have given ten years of my life. It's more than I had dared to hope!

MRS. DEBNEY. Amazing person! And it was *you* brought Walter to the house! Your old school-fellow!

ARNOLD (*gaily*). She can't marry *all* my old schoolfellows, Aunt Clara, can she? And don't worry, and don't be sorry. Walter's all right, of course, and a very good fellow. But Thursfield's a man in a thousand!

(*He returns to DOROTHY: they stand together.*)

MRS. DEBNEY. As long as the man in *ten* thousand doesn't come along, to be followed by the one in a million! . . . One mustn't let it become a habit.

DOROTHY. Don't be afraid, Aunt Clara! I won't.

MRS. DEBNEY. A little disconcerting, of course, the change of Romeos, to an elderly person, with a bad memory for names. Well, I can't help it! And now, as I'm not wanted any more, there seems no reason why I shouldn't go and play bridge with what is left of Mrs. Atkins.

(*She makes a movement as though to rise; DOROTHY runs to her and presses her back into her chair.*)

DOROTHY (*gaily*). Not yet! Have you forgotten that you're the signal?

MRS. DEBNEY. (*sinking back into her chair*). That's so, I'm Cupid!

DOROTHY. Yes, dear. Or—(*caressing her*) you'll like it better—the Queen of Hearts. (*Clapping her hands*) You're the Queen of Hearts, Aunt Clara!

MRS. DEBNEY. Well, I play many rôles to-day. First, I'm the chucker-out——

ARNOLD. You?

MRS. DEBNEY. I was entrusted with the delicate duty of finally dismissing Walter.

ARNOLD. And how did he take it?

MRS. DEBNEY. Banners flying, band playing, very angry. Oh, *very* angry. Then I was the Court of Love that tried Dorothy's case——

ARNOLD (*with deep feeling*). You mustn't blame her. She has been—I've no word for it.

DOROTHY (*laying a hand affectionately on his arm*). Dear Arnold!

ARNOLD (*looking at her*). No word. But if I'm a free man to-day——

(DOROTHY makes a movement—*hush!* MRS. DEBNEY looks inquiringly at him.)

MRS. DEBNEY. What, have you been breaking off an engagement, too?

DOROTHY (*lightly*). He's talking nonsense—aren't you, dear Arnold? He has taken this trouble of mine too much to heart.

MRS. DEBNEY (*looking placidly from one to the other*). Well, you've evidently told me as much as it is good for me to know, and it's a mercy I'm not curious. I see that all that's expected of me is to open my eyes and shut my mouth——

DOROTHY (*laughing*). And I'll pop in Edward!

[*A ring: she runs to the window.*]

DOROTHY. There he is! (*She comes back, and bustles round Mrs. DEBNEY, making the old lady get out of her chair*) Aunt Clara, in *that* chair please, where he can see you. (*She steers Mrs. DEBNEY to it, and presses her down*) And as the door opens, you'll beam!

MRS. DEBNEY (*as she sits*). Beam?

DOROTHY. Yes—a thousand-candle-power beam! You'll see—he will, too. Arnold, you at the back, I here. Now, are you ready?

(MRS. DEBNEY'S chair faces the door; DOROTHY stands beside her, ARNOLD behind. The door opens, EDWARD appears, ushered by MINNIE.)

MINNIE. Mr. Thursfield.

[*She goes.*]

(EDWARD *stands for a moment irresolute on the threshold*; then he gives a glad smile as he sees MRS. DEBNEY.)

DOROTHY (*stepping forward formally*). How do you do, Mr. Thursfield? Allow me to introduce you to my Aunt Clara. (*She takes him by the arm*) Aunt Clara, this is Edward.

MRS. DEBNEY (*rising*). Mr. Thursfield——

DOROTHY. Edward.

MRS. DEBNEY. Mr. Edward——

DOROTHY. Edward.

MRS. DEBNEY. Well, then, Edward—I—am very glad to see you.

EDWARD (*moved*). Oh, Mrs. Debney——

DOROTHY. Aunt Clara.

EDWARD. Aunt Clara, I'm a very happy man to-day. I don't deserve her, I'm too old for her, but——(*He takes her hand and kisses it, then leans forward and slaps ARNOLD on the shoulder*) Faringay! You see? I told you it would be all right!

DOROTHY. As to *that*, you know, the future will decide. But at least I can promise you that, whatever your wife turns out, you'll have a very good aunt. And now we'll have tea. [*She rings.*]

EDWARD. May I sit down?

DOROTHY. I think Aunt Clara would like it. (*He sits—she does also, by his side*) Let me tell you there's a bond of sympathy between you. *She's* a bridge-builder too.

EDWARD (*puzzled for a moment, then bursting into a smile*). Oh, the game! I mean to learn it—as a provision for my old age.

MRS. DEBNEY. That's a long way ahead.

DOROTHY. Polite Aunt Clara! She always says the right thing, Edward, and people come from as far as Notting Hill to consult her on points of tact. (MINNIE *comes in*) Tea please. (MINNIE *goes*) Say something, Arnold. The first introduction to the domestic circle of a lady's *fiancé* is always em-

barrassing. Every member of the family is expected to contribute.

ARNOLD (*who has been leaning on the back of MRS. DEBNEY'S chair, stepping forward*). Well, I *should* like to say one word. And that is, that I congratulate you both, with all the heart that is in me. [*He sits.*]

EDWARD (*heartily*). Thank you, Faringay.

DOROTHY. That was quite nice, Arnold—quite—dear Arnold! . . . Aunt Clara, your turn.

MRS. DEBNEY (*turning towards her*). My dear, I don't know——

DOROTHY. I'll prompt you. Some pathetic reference to your overwhelming regret at parting with the niece you adore——

MRS. DEBNEY (*to EDWARD*). I *am* very fond of her.

DOROTHY. With a pious desire that he'll prove a good husband and obey me in everything——

(MINNIE comes in with the tea, which she places before DOROTHY who proceeds to make the tea, and then to pour it out.)

MRS. DEBNEY. She *has* always had her own way, Mr. Thursfield.

DOROTHY. Edward.

MRS. DEBNEY. Edward—and I *do* hope——

[*She pauses.*]

EDWARD. Mrs. Debney, I love her—and I'll do everything in the world—to prove myself worthy—of the love she has given me.

DOROTHY. Don't get solemn, Edward, or I'll telephone for the tom toms, and we'll get married at once.

EDWARD. When *shall* we get married, Dorothy?

DOROTHY. Oh, the century's very young. (*To MRS. DEBNEY*) He *has* lived among tribes, you know, where the whole wedding ceremony consisted in jumping over a stick!

EDWARD. I regard three weeks as the maximum

delay, and three days as the irreducible minimum. (*He appeals to MRS. DEBNEY*) Aunt Clara!

MRS. DEBNEY (*emphatically*). I am certainly *not* a believer in long engagements.

DOROTHY. I *told* you you'd like him! (*Turning to EDWARD*) And let me tell you her opinion is valuable—she knows a great deal about husbands—she's had several! (*Patting MRS. DEBNEY'S hand, as she raises it in protest*) All right, dear, I won't tease you—and there *weren't* so very many, after all. And as soon as you've had your tea you shall be allowed to go to your Mrs. Atkins—while I—make my confession—to Edward. (*Her voice completely changes as she says this—and she goes to him and kisses him shyly, tenderly, then returns to her seat. She has scarcely sat down when there is a sharp ring. She looks up startled*)

DOROTHY. Oh, I do hope it isn't a visitor! Arnold, will you give this to Aunt Clara. (*She hands him a cup*) Here—Edward——

(*She has risen, holding the cup that she is handing to EDWARD. ARNOLD is taking another to MRS. DEBNEY when there is the sound of sudden altercation in the hall—WALTER'S voice crying roughly, "Nonsense, nonsense, I must see her!" and he bursts into the room. DOROTHY and ARNOLD put their cups down, and stand, petrified, unable to speak or move.*)

WALTER (*fearfully excited, seeing only DOROTHY*). Dorothy, Dorothy, how *could* you! Dorothy, I've come here to say I'll do it—I will. You shall have the three thousand—I'll get it somehow. I never thought that you really meant——

(*He has suddenly become conscious of the presence of EDWARD; he stops dead, and stares at him. There is a moment's silence; EDWARD rises slowly.*)

EDWARD (*in a strange, numb voice*). Who is this gentleman?

WALTER (*fiercely*). My name is Gresham. I am Miss Faringay's fiancé.

EDWARD. You are—what?

WALTER. She is engaged to me. Who are you?

MRS. DEBNEY (*wringing her hands, in great distress, as she bends forward to EDWARD*). Oh, Mr. Thursfield, Mr. Thursfield—

WALTER (*wildly*). Thursfield—the man from the office—the man who was building the bridge! . . . (*He stares at EDWARD*) You met her at St. Moritz. Oh, my God, were you going to pay the money?

ARNOLD (*suddenly turning fiercely on WALTER*). She sent you away. Why have you come back?

EDWARD (*coldly motioning to ARNOLD*). Leave him alone, please. (*To WALTER, from whom he has scarcely taken his eyes*) You seem to be informed about this money, Mr. Gresham?

WALTER (*dazed in vague alarm, looking hesitatingly from one to the other*). She told me she must have three thousand pounds to pay for Arnold.

EDWARD (*slowly*). She . . . told . . . you . . .

MRS. DEBNEY. To pay for Arnold!

(EDWARD turns and looks at DOROTHY; she is in a pitiable state of collapse and despair. Conscious of his gaze, her head sinks; she drops into a chair. EDWARD turns to WALTER again.)

EDWARD. When did Miss Faringay first ask you for this money, Mr. Gresham?

WALTER (*answering mechanically*). A month ago. But I wouldn't—I didn't know—

EDWARD. A month ago . . . before she went to St. Moritz . . .

WALTER. Yes, yes, of course—then again this afternoon. But, Dorothy, I didn't mean it!

ARNOLD (*savagely*). You fool, you fool!

EDWARD (*slowly*). I am beginning to understand. . . . How long have you been engaged to Miss Faringay?

WALTER. Six months. (*With sudden passionate resentment*) But why are you asking these questions? What business is it of yours?

EDWARD (*quietly*). I also appear to be engaged to Miss Faringay.

WALTER (*frantic*). You! You! Oh!!! I see, of course—you offered the money!

EDWARD. Yes.

WALTER. Oh! *That* was why she sent me away to-day—said she wouldn't marry me? She was prepared to sacrifice herself—to you! My poor Dorothy, because I refused you were going to——

DOROTHY (*suddenly springing wildly to her feet*). Oh! Haven't you said enough!

(*For an instant not a word is spoken. WALTER stares haggardly at DOROTHY, who, after her moment of excitement, has relapsed into her apathy and misery. MRS. DEBNEY is crying, completely overwhelmed; ARNOLD stands doggedly in his place, cursing under his breath. The silence is broken by EDWARD, who still in the same calm and almost monotonous tone that he has used since WALTER's appearance, now quietly addresses him.*)

EDWARD. There has been a mistake, Mr. Gresham. Believe me, there shall be no sacrifice. There has been a misunderstanding. Would you be kind enough to—leave us—for a moment?

WALTER. No, no—I can't—I——

EDWARD. I would like just one word, before I go, with Miss Faringay—and her brother.

WALTER (*hysterically*). I——

DOROTHY (*in a low voice, without looking up*). Go.

(WALTER stares at her, tries to speak, checks himself, then goes slowly, hanging his head. MRS. DEB-

NEY *follows him ; at the door she turns, still crying, to EDWARD*)

MRS. DEBNEY. Mr. Thursfield, will you let me——

EDWARD (*with a quiet gesture*). Truly, there is no need.

(*She follows WALTER out of the room. ARNOLD and DOROTHY have not stirred.*)

EDWARD (*with, for the first time, a note of harshness and menace coming into his voice*). Faringay, you have been a party to this?

DOROTHY (*wildly, from her corner*). Not his fault—mine!

EDWARD (*ignoring her*). You have been a party to this, Faringay?

DOROTHY (*almost in a shriek*). I tell you—I tell you——

EDWARD (*over his shoulder*). Be silent. (*To ARNOLD*) Well—have you nothing to say?

ARNOLD (*doggedly*). No. Nothing.

EDWARD. The voucher is altered, the money paid. And I shall not go back on my word—the dupe will not turn on those who have duped him. But—let me tell you—your theft from the firm is as nothing compared with the—loathsomeness—of sending your sister to me as a—decoy.

DOROTHY (*hysterically*). He didn't—he didn't—he didn't know!

EDWARD (*for a moment turning his head to her*). Miss Faringay, sisterly devotion is very admirable, but it can be carried too far.—And why not have the truth now? Since the money is paid! (*He turns to ARNOLD again*) You have been very fortunate, Faringay, in finding this lady so willing to lend herself to your ingenious little scheme—fortunate, too, in having worked it on a man who takes it so pleasantly. For I shall do nothing—

nothing at all. So you have won: your victory is complete: and I congratulate you—both. You are a free man, Faringay—and you have earned your freedom—trebly earned it. And now . . . liar and coward . . . go.

ARNOLD (*lifting his head in sudden fury and striding violently towards EDWARD*). Thursfield!

EDWARD (*without a movement, his voice remaining quiet and unemotional*). Liar, because you have lied to me again and again since my return; coward, because you have . . . traded . . . on your sister's indifference . . . to honour and shame.

DOROTHY (*convulsively burying her head in her hands and sinking on the sofa*). Oh, oh!

ARNOLD (*in mad fury*). Say what you like about me, but don't dare——

EDWARD. Tsch, why these heroics? A few hard words, Farigay. They're not dear—at the price.

ARNOLD (*wildly*). I'm a thief—all right—call me that—call *me* what you like. But my sister——

EDWARD. Has been your confederate. Go.

ARNOLD. You think I'll take your money?

EDWARD. I'm quite sure of it, Faringay. Isn't that what you wanted?

ARNOLD (*trembling with passion*). I'll go straight to the Chief—now—now——

EDWARD. Only as far as his doorstep! And don't be afraid—I won't give you away—not even to Holland! So that's all settled—and all's for the best in the best possible of worlds. Now leave us.

ARNOLD. No! Not till——

DOROTHY (*moaning*). Arnold!

ARNOLD (*after a haggard glance at her*). *My* fault, not hers. *My* crime, or whatever it is. But she——

EDWARD. Will speak for herself. Go.

DOROTHY (*scarcely above a whisper, as she sways to and fro on the sofa*). Arnold, Arnold, do as he tells you . . .

(ARNOLD gives another glance at her ; then goes, mechanically, automatically, as though hypnotized, and closes the door. The street door is heard to bang—till then there is silence, DOROTHY not stirring from the sofa. Suddenly EDWARD turns towards her, looks at her—then, almost involuntarily, with a broken note in his voice, all the anger and scorn gone from it, ejaculates “You!” She rises slowly, and drags herself towards him—he stops her with a gesture.)

EDWARD (*quietly*). What have you to say?

DOROTHY (*in a wail*). You won’t believe me!

EDWARD (*slowly, his voice colorless, responding to the deadness within him*). You love your brother—I must remember that. You *do* love your brother. It is for him you have done these . . . terrible . . . things.

DOROTHY (*stretching out imploring hands*). Edward—

EDWARD (*shrinking from her, as though almost physically wounded*). Don’t call me that—don’t, don’t, that’s all over. . . Tell me, you went to St. Moritz because I was there? . . . (*She cannot speak*) Oh, you must answer!

DOROTHY (*under her breath*). Yes.

EDWARD. With the deliberate intention of making me love you?

DOROTHY. Yes.

EDWARD. And all the time you were engaged to Mr. Gresham?

DOROTHY. . . . Yes . . .

EDWARD. Meaning to fool me, as soon as I had paid the money—throw me over, and marry him? (*She moistens her lips, unable to speak*) Well?

DOROTHY. Yes.

(*There is a moment’s silence ; suddenly she bursts out feverishly.*)

DOROTHY. Listen—listen—let me tell you—

EDWARD (*very gently*). No. Why say any more—what else is there to say? . . . And you could come to the office to-day—to persuade me—in case I should be—reluctant!

DOROTHY (*in agony*). Oh! Haven't you shamed me enough!

EDWARD (*turning to her almost contritely, speaking very sincerely*). I've no wish to do that. . . . Underneath all this was your love for your brother—I suppose you thought yourself—justified. . . . But still—it was very cruel.

DOROTHY (*wildly*). Let me explain! Oh, I beseech you, let me explain!

EDWARD (*shaking his head*). The time is gone—there are facts before us, facts that can't be explained away. You have deceived me, and I trusted you—words cannot help us now. You have deceived me—and, poor thing, you were ready to marry me, to make this sacrifice——

DOROTHY (*passionately*). No sacrifice, no, no——

EDWARD. Because I had saved your brother. You have been . . . wicked, Miss Faringay—perhaps more foolish than wicked—but I am not your judge.

DOROTHY. Hear me! Let me speak!

EDWARD. There is too much anger within me—too much bitterness. I couldn't be . . . just . . . to you. You see, one can only think of oneself. You don't know what you meant to me. Well, that's all over. I shall go to Rhodesia to-morrow.

DOROTHY. I love you!

EDWARD (*with a warning gesture, scarcely raising his voice, which still has not a trace of bitterness, but only sorrow and pity*). Hush, you mustn't say that. There was this other man you loved—till to-day. To me you are only grateful. Oh, I see too clearly! I was there, and you used me; you went out to snare me: you made me believe what never was true. Your brother came first, you thought, and I didn't matter. Ah, but remember always—there

are some things women must not do—even for their brother's sake!

(*Without another glance at her he goes, brusquely, suddenly, leaving her dumb, crushed, bewildered . . .*)

CURTAIN.

ACT IV.

(**EDWARD'S** rooms in the Temple. *It is his home—his permanent abode when in town—and the place is intimate and personal, for all its simplicity. At back, there is a door, leading to an inner room, with another door inside. At right, a door leading to a little hall, a tiny place, with the entrance door to the further right. The room is panelled in oak, and has a quaint, a trifle dingy, but exceedingly pleasant and attractive appearance. On the walls are Whistler etchings, a photograph or two of Old Masters, and one bridge—the one he showed to DOROTHY at the office. Some Egyptian things are about the place—there are various odds and ends that he has picked up in his wanderings. Some well-thumbed books on the shelf—a pipe-rack—on the table a silver cigarette-box and a tray with a cut-glass bottle of whiskey.*)

EDWARD is seated, his legs stretched on the fender-rail, his back to the audience; **PETER** is in an arm-chair, facing him, cracking his fingers. Neither of them is speaking; and it is evident that they have not spoken for some time. After a pause **PETER** gives himself a little shake, puts his glass to his lips, drinks, then rises and stretches himself.)

PETER. Well—I think I'll go.

EDWARD (*aroused from a reverie, half-turning his head*). Must you? Early, isn't it?

PETER. Past eleven.

EDWARD. Ah . . . (*He gets up slowly*) Well, old chap. [*He moves towards PETER.*

PETER (*with awkward kindness, as he looks at EDWARD*). I'm afraid I've not been of much good to you, Teddie.

EDWARD. Very jolly of you to have spent the evening with me.

PETER. We've not been *very* festive. (EDWARD *turns away, goes to the table, and takes a cigarette*) Our dinner was the most funereal function I've ever sat down to. And we've been here a couple of hours—I've tried to say a word, every ten minutes or so——

EDWARD (*lighting his cigarette*). I've been rotten bad company, Peter. I'm sorry.

(*He holds out the cigarette-box to him. PETER shakes his head.*)

PETER. No, thanks—shan't smoke any more. (*He moves away*) D'you know, Teddie—I'm feeling a trifle hurt.

EDWARD. Hurt! Why?

PETER. I've not asked any questions—I've been waiting for you to tell me.

EDWARD. What?

PETER. Who the woman is, and what she has done. (EDWARD *shrugs his shoulders*) Oh, of course it's a woman—what else would a man like you run away from? This morning you were going to stay here—now you're off to Rhodesia. By the way, the Chief must be mighty pleased?

EDWARD. I sent him a letter—I haven't seen him. And if that's how you feel about it, Peter, you shall have the whole—moving—story!

PETER (*deprecatingly*). Not if you'd rather——

EDWARD (*puffing at his cigarette*). Pooh, it

won't take very long—and I don't suppose it's startlingly novel, or original. I met a girl I thought was fine—well, she wasn't. I thought she loved me—well, she didn't. I trusted her, and she wasn't worth it. There you have it, old Peter! So I'm off to Rhodesia, and it's all over, and done with.

PETER. Hard luck. Who was she?

EDWARD. That doesn't matter.

PETER. No.

EDWARD (*leaning against the mantelpiece, and staring into the fire*). Fact is, I've let the time slip by when women fall in love with men. (*He turns*) It's rather nice of you, Peter, to spare me the obvious jokes!

PETER. I? I'm not likely. Been through it myself.

EDWARD. You?

PETER (*with a grim little chuckle*). Surprises you, doesn't it? Two years ago—you were in Egypt. Engaged we were—wedding-day fixed—then she felt that she—couldn't.

EDWARD (*coming to him and patting him on the shoulder*). Poor old Peter!

PETER. Tell you what it is, Teddie—there are some fellows who're sort of—disinherited.

EDWARD (*going back to the fire*). All in the day's work.

PETER (*sitting*). Work's not everything. You'll call me a sentimental old fool, perhaps—but I know this—there's only one thing in this world that's worth a damn—and that's hearing a woman tell you that she loves you.

EDWARD. There are others.

PETER. The one thing on God's earth. Well, I shall never hear it.

EDWARD. Nor I. And that can't be helped, and I'm not going to worry. But who would have thought that *you*—!

PETER. Even in an ugly old clerk there's something—very real—that wants a wife, and children.

(*He breaks off, and is silent for a moment, nursing his leg.*) Tell me, Teddie—she treated you badly?

EDWARD (*carelessly*). I suppose so. . But I may be wrong. I don't know much about women.

PETER (*thoughtfully*). They're funny things. I'd given my little girl a ring. Well, she met the other fellow, and sent me a letter—but she kept the ring.

EDWARD. Why?

PETER (*very simply*). Because of the diamonds, I suppose.

EDWARD. That wasn't nice of her.

PETER. Not very—no. But I'm glad to think of her, wearing my ring. She was very pretty. And I'm always grateful to a girl for being pretty.

EDWARD. You're more of a philosopher than I am, Peter.

PETER. When I looked at myself in the glass, I forgave her. Fact is, there are some men women don't care for, and I'm one of them.

EDWARD. I expect I'm another. And we're not always the worst kind of men, either.

PETER (*getting up and going to EDWARD*). What did she do?

EDWARD. Old man, we'll leave it there. What does it matter? I'm a little bit sore, of course—but that will pass. The point is that she didn't love me. And that won't affect the tide in the morning, or put another cloud in the sky. Besides, I've lived in the open too much, with growing things round me—makes women's ways seem strange. Out there, in the desert, or when you're fighting a river—it's great odds, but all pretty straight.

PETER. Wasn't she?

EDWARD (*shortly*). No. But we'll drop all that. At least she has cured me—and *that's* all over. But there's one thing I'll tell you—I don't believe in that disinherited theory of yours.

PETER. You don't?

EDWARD. No. We all have our inheritance

somewhere. Mine's my work, and I'm not going to snivel.

PETER (*with a sigh*). All right for you—you go out and tackle big jobs. I'm stuck in the office all day—and when I get home all I have is a collection of postage stamps and a wheezy old terrier.

EDWARD. There are some of us must be alone. I suppose that it's written. Great thing is not to mind.

PETER. You're a good-looking chap. With a face like yours *you* can get married whenever you want to!

EDWARD (*breezily*). But I *don't* want! I've learned my lesson—love-making's not for me. (*He comes up to PETER*) Old man, old tubful of sentiment, I'll come over for *your* wedding—I will, and be best man. But Thursfield 'll go on building bridges till the end of him—and he won't howl as long as God lets him stand on his legs and do the work that he's fit for. And now—(*he goes to the table and pours himself out a drink*) here's to you—and to me! [*He drinks.*]

PETER (*emptying his glass*). To us! Well, I'll go. (*A loud, authoritative knock at the outer door.*) Hullo! Expecting someone?

EDWARD. No.

(*He goes into the hall, opens the outer door, and gives an ejaculation of surprise at finding SIR HENRY there, puffing and blowing after his climb up four flights of stairs. The old man is very angry, and merely gives a grunt in reply to EDWARD'S "Good evening." He comes stumping into the room, with EDWARD following him.*)

PETER (*rising*). Chief——

SIR HENRY (*glaring at him*). Ah, Mr. Holland, so you're here too? That's good. I've something to say to you both.

EDWARD. Won't you sit down?

(*He moves up a chair, that SIR HENRY jerks himself into.*)

SIR HENRY (*as he sits*). Pretty couple you are! Nice sort of people for a man to have confidence in!

PETER (*startled*). Why—what——

SIR HENRY. Faringay has been to me—routed me out at the Club——

PETER. Faringay!

SIR HENRY. Made a clean breast of things. Now what have *you* to say for yourselves?

[*He glares from EDWARD to PETER.*]

PETER (*amazed and distressed*). Faringay told you!

SIR HENRY (*savagely*). Everything. See here, you, Mr. Holland. The other man's a damned fool, and we'll talk to him later. But *you* are the manager of my office, the person who represents *me*, my servant, the man I trust.

PETER (*meekly*). Yes, Chief.

SIR HENRY. And it seems to me that when you discover that a clerk of mine has been robbing me, it's your business to come and tell *me*.

EDWARD (*interposing, quietly*). He wanted to. I wouldn't let him.

SIR HENRY (*turning fiercely on him*). Thursfield, you've taken an infernal liberty—that's the word, sir, and I won't withdraw it.

EDWARD. Since the money was paid——

SIR HENRY. That has nothing to do with it. The beggar robbed *me*. It was your duty, both of you, to come to me straightaway.

EDWARD. You know all the circumstances?

SIR HENRY. Yes, I do.

EDWARD. And don't you think this was a case for forgiveness?

SIR HENRY. I think, Mr. Thursfield, that *I* was the proper judge of that.

EDWARD. What have you done to him now?

SIR HENRY. Kicked him out—told him never to

show his face in my office again. Holland, I pay that money—not Thursfield. I don't take presents from my employees.

EDWARD. You've kicked him out?

SIR HENRY. I have. Promptly.

EDWARD (*sitting, facing the old man*). Very well, Then I don't go to Rhodesia.

SIR HENRY (*with a fresh blaze of wrath*). What the devil——

EDWARD. You can kick me out too. I leave the firm.

SIR HENRY. Do you know what you're saying? What new nonsense is this?

EDWARD (*quietly*). With all respect to you, Chief, unless Faringay is reinstated, I leave the firm.

SIR HENRY (*rising, proudly*). It seems to me you're dictating terms to me, Mr. Thursfield.

EDWARD (*rising, also*). This is a matter in which I am compelled to, Sir Henry.

SIR HENRY (*roaring*). I decline to take back into my office a man who's a thief and a scoundrel!

EDWARD. A man who, after I paid the money he took, after I cleaned the slate, comes and tells you himself?

SIR HENRY. I refuse to take him back.

EDWARD. Very well then—I leave you.

SIR HENRY (*furiously*). Am I the man to be coerced and bullied?

EDWARD. I fancy we are neither of us men to be bullied, Sir Henry.

PETER (*timidly*). Chief——

SIR HENRY (*turning savagely on him*). Hold your tongue, you! (*To EDWARD*) Thursfield, I've a great affection for you—we've pulled off some big things together——

EDWARD. And will again.

SIR HENRY. But this man Faringay's a thief——

EDWARD. The fine thing he did, in confessing to you, wipes out the mad thing he did, in taking the money.

SIR HENRY. I'm an engineer, not an apostle. I won't take him back.

EDWARD. You will.

SIR HENRY. I'll be damned if I will!

EDWARD. I've pledged my word.

SIR HENRY. Doesn't bind me.

EDWARD. I am bound by it.

SIR HENRY. To whom?

EDWARD. That doesn't matter.

SIR HENRY. It does, though. To whom? (*The idea suddenly flashing upon him*) By the Jumping Cats of Nineveh! Not the girl who's chucked you?

EDWARD (*protesting*). Chief——

SIR HENRY (*eagerly*). Girl you told me about? Of course she's chucked you, or you wouldn't be going to Rhodesia. If it's she—I give in.

EDWARD. You do?

SIR HENRY. Yes!

EDWARD. Very well then—it is.

SIR HENRY (*with a great chuckle of glee, bouncing back into his chair and beaming—the picture of happiness and good-nature*). In honor of her I forgive Faringay, and Holland, and everyone! She's a duck of a girl, and I'd do anything for her. I gave a sovereign to the messenger-boy who brought me your letter. I want to write and thank her—send her a breaking-off present. It's girls like her that have made this country great. Holland, you rascal, we'll keep Faringay—give him another chance. But if *you* ever again——

PETER (*gasping*). Oh, Chief, no fear of that!

SIR HENRY (*to EDWARD, peering into his face*). Definitely off, Thursfield? Irrevocably? Not going to write to her? No nonsense of that sort?

EDWARD. None.

SIR HENRY. No letting her come snivelling round and hooking you on again?

EDWARD (*shortly*). Our rupture is absolute and final.

SIR HENRY. Heartiest congratulations—angels

watching over you—miraculous escape. And stick to that splendid girl—make it a Dante and Beatrice affair—you can't expect the same luck twice. Tell me, who was she? Faringay's sister, sweetheart—no, of course, must be his sister——

EDWARD (*quietly*). I don't think we need go any further into that, Chief.

SIR HENRY. Wound still sore? Bah, jump on it, tread on it. Holland, what are you going to do with Faringay?

PETER (*deprecatingly*). I was proposing to send him to Nicaragua for a year or two, Chief.

SIR HENRY. That's right—good idea—chap must be punished—but he won't go wrong again. And come to me to-morrow—we'll have a word to say to the bucket-shop people. Not going to take this thing lying down—not me! *I'll give 'em a testimonial!* And you, Thursfield—(*he slaps EDWARD on the back*) hurrah for the Falls! No more billing and cooing! Burn your poetry books and get into your working clothes. (*He looks round and beams*) Here we are, three jolly bachelors! Good-bye, boys. I'll be at the station to-morrow, and see you off. Wish I were going with you! If I were only sixty again!

(*With a nod to them and a wave of the hand he stumps out in his usual hurricane fashion.*

EDWARD *sees him to the hall door.* PETER *shakes himself, goes to the table, mixes himself a stiff whiskey and soda, and tosses it off.* As he *puts the glass down, his eye falls on a framed photograph standing on EDWARD's desk; he takes it up and looks curiously at it, replacing it when he hears EDWARD return.*

PETER. Whfff! Well out of that! But Teddie—Faringay!

EDWARD. Yes.

PETER. Rotten trick to play on me. Really unpardonable. Can't make it out.

EDWARD. I'm to blame for it, Peter—I was hard on him this evening—I left him no option.

PETER. Oh, I see! . . . And I say, is this the girl? (*He nods to the photograph. EDWARD takes it up and quietly drops it on to the table*) Forgive me, old chap—I didn't mean . . . By Jove, the way you stood up to the Chief!

EDWARD (*with a shrug*). Well, there's no harm done, anywhere. Have another drink, Peter?

PETER. No, thanks—just put away a pretty stiff one. Chief made my knees shake. What a lot he thinks of you! Old chap, I'll be going.

[*He holds out his hand.*

EDWARD (*shaking hands with him*). Good-bye, Peter.

PETER. I'll see you at the station in the morning. Last talk we shall have for some time. Well, God bless you, old man!

EDWARD. And you—with all my heart!

(*With a final shake, and a nod, PETER goes. EDWARD walks out with him—then sports his oak, closes the hall door, switches off the light in the hall, and returns, closing the door. He yawns and stretches himself—gives a look round—shrugs his shoulders, lights a cigarette; and, for a second, stands, thinking, in front of the fireplace. Then, suddenly, he flings the cigarette into the grate, walks quickly across the room, switches off the light, and opens the door leading to the bedroom. A ray of light shines through the inner door. He pauses for a moment in surprise, but flings the door open. DOROTHY stands on the threshold.*)

EDWARD (*starting back*). You!

DOROTHY. Yes.

EDWARD. You here!

DOROTHY. I've been here for hours.

EDWARD. How?

DOROTHY. You were out when I came—the woman let me in—I waited.

EDWARD. She allowed you to wait after she left?

DOROTHY. Yes.

EDWARD. Why were you in there?

DOROTHY. When you came Mr. Holland was with you—I slipped in there.

(*With a shrug of annoyance EDWARD returns to the room, switching on the light; she follows, and stands before him, trembling with excitement and emotion. He has mastered himself; and, when he speaks to her, he strives hard to make his voice not sound harsh or unkind.*)

EDWARD. *Why* have you come? What can we two have to say to each other?

DOROTHY (*feverishly*). This afternoon you wouldn't hear me. I've a right—a right—to be heard.

EDWARD. You don't really think that anything you can tell me now would make any difference?

DOROTHY. No. I'm not expecting that. You've finished with me, of course—I've killed your love, I know. I only want you to understand *why*—I have done—these things.

EDWARD. It is really not necessary. You did them to save your brother. And let me tell you at once. He has been to Sir Henry.

DOROTHY. I know. I heard.

EDWARD. You did?

DOROTHY. You raised your voices. I heard what took place between you and the old man.

EDWARD. Very well then—so your mind can be at rest. You owe me nothing—nothing at all—and Mr. Gresham won't be called upon.

DOROTHY. I know. And I thank you for what you have done—even now—for my brother—and me.

EDWARD (*gently*). I had given my word. Well,

don't you think you had better go home? Your people will be very uneasy.

DOROTHY. I must speak to you first. You leave for Rhodesia to-morrow?

EDWARD. Yes.

DOROTHY (*wildly*). So what could I do but come here! I don't want you to despise me—too much. I want you to—understand—oh, not to forgive, but just to understand! It was like this. I suddenly learned what Arnold had done. I discovered—and oh, I assure you, *he* was innocent of my scheme all through—I discovered that *you* could save him, with one stroke of the pen.

EDWARD (*quietly*). Become a thief too—help him to rob my employer?

DOROTHY (*faintly, bowing her head*). I didn't think your—passing the accounts—would mean all that, I didn't think at all—my brain seemed paralyzed—I acted on blind impulse. I rushed off to St. Moritz—I didn't tell Walter—I didn't tell anyone. I had one idea—to save Arnold—that blotted out everything else.

EDWARD. Wasn't I a human being, with a heart and soul of my own?

DOROTHY. I was mad—mad with fear and anxiety. Out there I fell into my own trap—I loved you.

EDWARD (*gently*). You mustn't say that—why do you say it? If it were true, would you not have broken off your engagement with Mr. Gresham?

DOROTHY. I had—deliberately—gone out to you—gone without his knowing—and he trusting me, believing in me—I couldn't—it would have seemed a—sort of—double treachery to me. So I said you and I must suffer—not Walter. That seemed—heroic—to me. To-day—well, he threw open the door.

EDWARD. He has really behaved very well. He came back this afternoon—was ready to do what you asked him.

DOROTHY. Yes, yes. But too late. And I compared him with you. And I suppose I realized then how insane I had been. Of course I've treated him badly—I've been appallingly wicked. And I was trying to be good—noble. If you could understand that—a little?

EDWARD (*almost soothingly*). I know that you've done all this for your brother's sake.

DOROTHY. Not altogether bad—a victim too—not the awful creature you thought her. That's all I want—that you should try—not to think—too harshly—of me. . . . Now I'll go. I thank you for listening to me so patiently. Good-bye.

[*She moves towards the door.*

EDWARD (*accompanying her*). Good-bye. Mr. Gresham seems a good fellow. I hope you'll be happy.

DOROTHY (*stopping short, with a sudden amazed turn towards him*). You don't think I'll marry Walter?

EDWARD. Why not? You were engaged to him?

DOROTHY. I drifted into that. I didn't know what love meant. No, no, I'll never marry. When you come back from Rhodesia—if you come back—I'll be as I am now. Because, though you can't believe it—and I've no right to expect you to believe it—in my life there has been you, and only you.

EDWARD (*with a gesture of pain*). Oh don't, at this last moment, say such things to me!

DOROTHY (*passionately*). *Because* it's our last moment—because we're here alone, alone in this room, alone in the world, and the truth sounds more real! Think, why didn't I do the easy thing, break off my engagement with Walter? Because my love for you gave me a sense of honor I hadn't before—of duty—I felt I must do the thing that seemed right. It wasn't—I know that now—but it seemed right then. I thought here we must suffer, you and I, and part: that my love for you was eternal, and not of this world. Mad, mad, I know—but the truth

—and there you have all that was deepest in me— all my thoughts and intentions! Yesterday I was a wild, foolish girl—to-day I'm twenty years older, I realise what I've done, that I've wantonly played with a good man's love. And I despise myself now as you despise me.

EDWARD (*firmly*). No.

DOROTHY. Oh, thank you for that! I've got my punishment—at least I'll bear it bravely. I deserve it. Good-bye.

EDWARD (*in deepest perplexity*). Wait. This is all—strange. You want me to believe that you loved me?

DOROTHY (*with all her soul*). Yes!

EDWARD. And that it was *because* you loved me—oh, is it possible!—that you were ready to sacrifice yourself as well as me?

DOROTHY. I knew that we loved each other, and nothing else seemed to count.

EDWARD. And you'll wait for me?

DOROTHY. Yes.

EDWARD. Till I come back—years?

DOROTHY (*eagerly*). Yes—oh yes!

EDWARD. Give up your youth, your life?

DOROTHY (*fervently*). All I have in the world!

EDWARD. This is true?

DOROTHY. Look into my heart, and see!

EDWARD. If I said, come to Rhodesia with me now?

DOROTHY. I'd go with you to the end of the world!

EDWARD (*opening his arms to her*). Then, Dorothy, my poor Dorothy, come!

CURTAIN.





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